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A PRIMER OF BURNS

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BY

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PREFACE

THESE pages are mainly intended to supply the reader of Burns with such facts concerning his life and works, as are most necessary for the understanding of his poetry. These facts have been chiefly derived from the editions by Chambers and Scott Douglas; the latter's arrangement of the poems has also been followed in tracing the development of the poet's work. The bibliography has been selected from various sources, and it is hoped that no work of importance has been omitted.

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A PRIMER OF BURNS

CHAPTER I.

AYRSHIRE.

THE life of Robert Burns falls naturally into three periods. The first of these covers the years spent in his various Ayrshire homes, down to his twenty-eighth year; the second includes the two winters spent in Edinburgh, the most brilliant period of his career, so far as worldly success and reputation go; the third comprises the eight years in Nithsdale and Dumfries, in which he fell to some extent out of acquaintance with his older friends, and out of the notice of his country, only to become more famous in death.

The family of Burnes, or Burness, belonged to Kincardineshire, where the poet's ancestors have been diligently traced back for several generations. His grandfather was a Robert Burnes, tenant of the farm of Clochnahill in the parish of Dunottar, who was the father of a family of eight or nine, born between 1717 and 1732. The third of these, born in 1721, was William Burnes, father of the poet.*

* The eldest brother, James, settled in Montrose, and it was apparently his son who adopted the spelling *Burness*, which the poet at first used.

"My forefathers," says the poet, "rented land of the famous noble Keiths of Marshal, and had the honour to share their fate." Whether Robert Burnes's misfortunes were due to this cause or not, poverty compelled his sons William and Robert to leave their native district in 1748, to seek for a living elsewhere. After two years' stay in Edinburgh, the former found his way to Ayrshire, where he obtained employment as a gardener, and afterwards leased seven acres of ground in the parish of Alloway, about a mile and a half south from Ayr, as a market garden. Here he built a clay cottage of the ordinary but-and-ben construction, and here he lived until 1766, serving as gardener to Ferguson of Doonholm, then Provost of Ayr. In December 1757 he married Agnes Brown, daughter of a Carrick farmer, and the first child of the marriage was Robert, born on January 25, 1759. His brother Gilbert was born on September 28, 1760, and another five, three daughters and two sons, completed the family.*

Alloway. 1759-1766.

The poet's mother is described as being possessed of a beautiful complexion, red hair, and dark eyes. She had an unbounded admiration for her husband, and "I can by no means wonder that she highly esteemed him," says John Murdoch; "for I myself have always considered William Burnes as by far the best of the

* The youngest was Isabella, afterwards Mrs. Begg, who was born in 1771. She survived till 1858, and was able to give much information regarding the poet. The chief original sources for an account of his early years are, (1) His autobiography, addressed in letter form to Dr. Moore, and written in the summer of 1787; (2) a letter from John Murdoch (Feb. 22, 1799), printed by Currie in 1800; (3) a letter from Gilbert Burns to Mrs. Dunlop, also given by Currie. Murdoch's letter only comes down to the removal from Mount Oliphant.

human race that ever I had the pleasure of being acquainted with." He was of a swarthy complexion, thin hair, and a form spare and bent with labour. In his wanderings he had acquired much experience of the world. "I have met with few who understood men, their manners, and their ways, equal to him," says his son; "but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently I was born a very poor man's son." From these accounts there can be little doubt which of his parents the poet most resembled, both in appearance and in temper. It is plain that his father was a man of no common stamp, yet of a kind not so rare in Scotland,—men whose innate desire for knowledge, and power of acquiring it and reasoning upon it, raise them to a mental plane far above what their position in life might be expected to yield them. It is also worth while to note Murdoch's remark, that "he spoke the English language with more propriety, both with respect to diction and pronunciation, than any man I ever knew with no greater advantages. This had a very good effect on the boys, who began to talk and reason like men much sooner than their neighbours." No doubt much of Robert's readiness of speech came from this feature in his father's manner.

To secure the education of his children—an aim ever dear to the Scottish parent—William Burnes, along with four of his neighbours, engaged the services of a young man of eighteen, the John Murdoch quoted above, who has given a full account of the transaction. As he boarded with his employers in turn, his description of life in the "argillaceous fabric," *alias* "clay-biggin," is full of interest. This was in 1765, when Robert was a little over six years old, but he had

already received some instruction from his father, and he and Gilbert were usually at the head of the class, except in music, where "Robert's ear in particular was dull, and his voice untunable. It was long before I could get them to distinguish one tune from another." There was no indication then of the future genius of Scottish song.

The school-books were of a kind still in use long after this period, the Bible and Masson's *Collection*. In the latter Robert found particular delight in the *Vision of Mirza* and one of Addison's hymns, while from a life of Hannibal lent him by Murdoch he received intense pleasure. Murdoch's teaching was of a thorough nature, well adapted to bring out the latent powers of his pupils, and in later years, while yet unknown to fame, the poet records the "many obligations" he owed to his "masterly teacher."* "In those years," he elsewhere records, "I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn, sturdy *something* in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot-piety. I say 'idiot-piety,' because I was then but a child."

At Whitsunday, 1766, William Burnes quitted his house at Alloway, and removed to the farm of Mount Oliphant, about two miles distant, which he had leased from his generous employer, Provost Ferguson. One of his main reasons for this step was to be able to keep his children at home, instead of sending them out to serve with others, exposed to all the dangers of such a life. The attendance of the boys at Murdoch's school now became irregular, in consequence of the distance, and

Mount Oliphant. 1766-1777.

* Letter to Murdoch, Jan. 15, 1783.

not long afterwards the teacher himself left the district. By this time, however, Robert had received a good training in English, and by the age of ten or eleven was "a critic in substantives, verbs and particles." From an old woman, named Betty Davidson, who lived with the family, he received learning of a different stamp. "She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, enchanted towers, giants, dragons, and other trumpery. *This cultivated the latent seeds of poesy.*"

Attendance at school being now given up, the father again undertook the education of his children, teaching them arithmetic in the evenings, and in this way the two elder girls received all their education. With the two eldest boys he conversed on all subjects as if they had been men, and always aimed at conveying instruction to them. For them he borrowed works on geography, astronomy, and natural history, and subscribed to Stackhouse's *History of the Bible.* All of these Robert eagerly read, while the accidental acquisition of a collection of letters by eminent writers laid the foundation of his later epistolary style. Two volumes of Richardson's *Pamela* which fell in his way about this time gave him his first novel, and almost the only one until many years later.

In 1772 the brothers were sent week about, during a summer quarter, to the school at Dalrymple to improve their penmanship. It was in this year too that Murdoch returned to Ayr, having been appointed teacher of English there. He then renewed his acquaintance with the family, sending them Pope's works, and some other poetry, "the first," says Gilbert,

"that we had an opportunity of reading, except what is contained in *The English Collection* . . .," a fact which may well account for the influence of Pope on some of Burns's later work. His former teacher being so near, Robert was sent to him in the summer of 1773, to revise his knowledge of grammar, and stayed with him for three weeks. During this short time, however, Murdoch had taught him a good deal of French—they had even begun to read *Télémaque* in the original—and he took home with him to Mount Oliphant a French grammar and dictionary. In that language he seems to have made considerable progress, but an attempt to learn Latin came to very little, the "Rudiments" proving as dry to him as they have done to many a one less gifted. His French, however, procured him some acquaintances in Ayr, rather above his own rank in the social scale, but not yet old enough, as he somewhat bitterly remarks, to exclude him from their society on that account.

But the farm now claimed most of his time. It was of seventy Scots acres in extent, of very poor soil, and taken at too high a rent. It might, by the conditions of the lease, have been given up in 1771, but in that year William Burnes had failed to find a better, and had perforce to remain where he was for six years more. To make ends meet the whole family had to do their utmost, and at fifteen Robert was the principal labourer on it, doing a grown man's work. Both he and Gilbert paint the miseries of these years in the darkest colours,—"the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing toil of a galley slave," is the poet's account of it. Hard work and scanty living was the lot of all, and this over-exertion was no doubt the main cause of his ill-health in after life. "My father's

generous master died," he adds, "and to clench the curse we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of *Twa Dogs* . . .; my indignation yet boils at the threatening insolent epistles from the Scoundrel Tyrant, which used to set us all in tears."

It was in the midst of all this distress that the young ploughman "first committed the sin of rhyme." This first attempt to express his feelings in verse was, appropriately enough, a love-song, inspired by the young girl who was his partner in the harvest-field, "a bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass," Nelly Kirkpatrick by name, and daughter of the blacksmith at Mount Oliphant. Although the poet refers to this song of *Handsome Nell* as "very puerile and silly," he not only took good care to give all the particulars connected with it in his letter to Dr. Moore, but he had set it down in his Commonplace Book in April 1783, with a detailed criticism of each verse.* No doubt he was prouder of his first verses than he afterwards cared to acknowledge. "I am always pleased with it," he wrote in 1783, "as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest and my tongue was sincere."

First song. 1773.

From the blacksmith, too, he borrowed Hamilton's version of Blind Harry's *Wallace*—a work dear to the Scot of last century, and the reading of it "poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest." The old minstrel had not lived in vain, when his epic, which he had bid "Go, bide thy time," bore such fruit in after days. In later years Burns gratified a desire to

* His finest account of his dawning Muse is that in the *Epistle to Mrs. Scott*, written while in Edinburgh, 1787.

visit the famous scenes of Scottish history; in these young days he chose a Sunday in summer to explore Leglen Wood, sacred to him as one of the haunts of Wallace.

Of the other works enumerated by the poet as having formed his reading during this period, the ones most likely to influence his future bent were the *Spectator*, Pope, Allan Ramsay, and a collection of English songs (*The Lark*, 1765). The latter, he says, "was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving in my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noting the tender or sublime from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe much to this for my critic-craft, such as it is."

Towards the end of the stay at Mount Oliphant, the young poet saw a little more of the world and its ways than was to be learned in the family circle. In his seventeenth year (1775) he attended a dancing-school, "in absolute defiance" of his father's commands, and "this instance of rebellion" caused his father, he believed (although Gilbert denied it), to take a kind of dislike to him. Resentment at this led him still further from parental control at the time when he most required it. In that same summer* he went to Kirkoswald on the Ayrshire coast, to learn mensuration and surveying. The place was a centre of contraband trade, and among its smugglers he became familiar with new and dangerous features of social life. But what finally ended his geometry was his falling madly in love with a girl, Peggy

Kirkoswald. 1775.

* The MS. of the Autobiography says "*seventeenth* year." Acting on information from Gilbert, Dr. Currie altered it to *nineteenth*, but it is unlikely that Burns himself would have made the mistake, and Gilbert is incorrect in some other dates.

Thomson by name, who lived next door to the school, and who so completely upset his studies that he found it useless to continue there any longer! The song, *Now westlin' winds*, referred to her, but perhaps belongs to the period when he had a new fit of admiration for her some years later.

The general result of this, however, he considered to be satisfactory. He was no longer "the most ungainly, awkward being in the parish." He had seen a new kind of life; he had read Shenstone and Thomson, and had made a number of friends, with whom he kept up a voluminous correspondence. His published letters were thus the work of no prentice hand; and even at that time he was in the habit of keeping copies of such of his epistles as pleased him most.

To this time, apparently, belong the songs of *Tibbie, I ha'e seen the day*, and *I dreamed I lay*, etc., in both of which poverty and hardship are met with an expression of that stubborn independence inherited from his father. A sadder note appears in the *Ruined Farmer*, with its refrain of "O, fickle Fortune, O." The long-gathering cloud of misfortune broke at length on the over-tasked family, and they had to seek a new home. To the poet it was the triumph of tyrannic power over integrity and virtue.

> "With tears indignant I behold the oppressor,
> Rejoicing in the honest man's destruction,
> Whose unsubmitting heart was all his crime."

The misfortunes were perhaps natural enough; and in Gilbert's narrative there is none of his brother's bitterness. A high rent, accidental losses, and insufficient labour are good reasons for the failure at Mount Oliphant.

Lochlea. 1777-1784.

William Burnes now removed to the farm of Lochlea, not far from the village of Tarbolton, and about the same distance from Mauchline. It was a larger farm than his previous one; and although the rent was high, the family seems to have enjoyed more comfort than before. During the early years of this period we know little about the poet. "My life," he writes, "flowed on much in the same tenor till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle!* were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie—*Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling*—were my bosom favourites." The latter, indeed, he speaks of as "a book I prize next to the Bible." "These years," says Gilbert, "were not marked by much literary improvement," but poetry was still "a darling walk" with him, by which he soothed his excited feelings.

It was now that Burns began to love in earnest. In earlier days he had been bashful in the society of the fair sex, now he was constantly in love with some girl, or rather with several at once, who possessed his affection in ever-varying degrees. In the songs of *The Tarbolton Lasses* and *The Ronalds of the Bennals* he celebrates some of his female acquaintances, and the latter piece bears out Gilbert's statement as to his real loves being seldom of superior station to himself. "He had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself, or who had more consequence in life. His love therefore rarely settled on persons of this description."

Among the names connected with this period are those of "Montgomerie's Peggy," who was his "deity for six or eight months" (1779), but was already en-

gaged to another, and of Ellison Begbie, in whose case his intentions seem to have been serious. Four (perhaps five) letters to her have been preserved through copies kept by Burns himself, and show not only some deep and honest feeling, but a command of language that is surprising. Whether they can well be called love-letters is another question. Several songs seem to belong to the same attachment—*The Lass of Cessnock Banks*, *Bonny Peggy Alison*, and *Mary Morison*.

At this time, too, the poet was one of the founders of the Tarbolton "Bachelors' Club," in the regulations of which, and in the questions discussed, much of his hand may be traced. Especially is this the case in the oft-quoted Rule X.—"Every man, proper for a member of this Society, must have a frank, honest, open heart, above anything dirty or mean, and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the club; and especially no mean-spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall, upon any pretence whatever, be admitted."*

In July of 1781 he became a Freemason, and later in the year left home again for Irvine, to learn the art of dressing flax, "partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life." The venture was unfortunate, both in itself and in some of its consequences. "My partner," he says, "was a scoundrel of the first water, who made money by the mystery of thieving," and matters ended in the workshop being burnt down during a New Year carouse, leaving Burns, "like a true poet, not worth a sixpence." Ellison Begbie, too,

Irvine. 1781-1782.

* The same feeling is expressed in several of his poetical epistles in 1785-6.

had rejected him, and no doubt a desire to be able to marry her had been one of his incentives. His health also was bad, so bad that his father came to see him at Irvine; and in a letter addressed to him on December 27, 1781, the poet speaks in the most despondent way of his condition and prospects, even looking forward with delight to an early release from all his troubles.

In Irvine he met with influences not of the best. His bosom friend was a certain Richard Brown, who had seen much of the world as a sailor. Burns found in him "courage, independence, and magnanimity, and every noble, manly virtue. I loved him, I admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and I strove to imitate him." In one respect the imitation had been better omitted. "He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star;" and his sailor training had led him beyond Burns's limits. It is just possible that the latter over-rated his friend's virtues; a tendency to do so in the case of the unfortunate is evinced by the entry in his Common-place Book for March 1784. Brown, however, recognized the genius of his companion, and to him Burns afterwards attributed his first idea of becoming a poet. His work at this time was but slight, consisting only of some religious pieces, all of them reflecting a depressed state of mind, and agreeing with the tone of his letter to his father. It was falling in with Fergusson's poems that again stirred his real muse within him.

If affairs were bad at Irvine, they were not much better at Lochlea, to which he now returned. The conditions of the lease had never been properly fixed, and after four years disputes arose with the landlord. These were submitted to arbitration, and the decision

was against the tenant. By this time the old man was nearing the end of his laborious life, and in the early part of 1783 gave signs of rapidly failing health. A letter written by the poet to his cousin, James Burness, in June of that year is curious for the account it gives of the state of Ayrshire at the time. His father's weakness spoken of in this letter was a lingering one, and on February 13, 1784, William Burnes died. On his present gravestone in Alloway churchyard are inscribed the lines in which his son summed up his noble character.

To provide against the worst, the two brothers had already taken the farm of Mossgiel, about a mile from Mauchline, rented at £90, from Gavin Hamilton, afterwards the poet's earliest patron. It was a family enterprise, stocked with what they had been able to save from the wreck, by ranking as creditors on their father's estate for wages due. Burns's own language is vigorous, as usual. "When my father died his all went among the rapacious hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice." Here, as at Lochlea, each member of the family was allowed wages for their labour on the farm; those of Robert and Gilbert were *seven pounds* each, and we have Gilbert's word for it that the former never exceeded his slender income. "His temperance and frugality were everything that could be wished;" but the influence of Mauchline and of the Freemasons was gradually proving too much for him.

Mossgiel. 1784-1786.

Misfortune again dogged his path. During the first two years on Mossgiel the seasons were backward and the crops bad. This overturned all the good resolves of Robert as to being a wise and prudent farmer, and he returned to his old careless ways. His book of

farming memoranda found other material for its pages —notes on Scottish songs, and scraps of verse like "O leave novels, ye Mauchline belles." The lessons learned from Brown at Irvine now brought their results in an event, from the knowledge of which the pious father had been happily spared. If the poet felt the incident deeply, he tried not to show it, and in the pieces relating to the affair the only note that redeems the attitude of reckless defiance is the tenderness expressed for both mother and child.

Here, however, it may be well to remind the reader, once for all, that Burns's conduct in such matters is not fairly to be judged by the standard of the present day. In Scottish country life of last century there was a general laxity of morals which formed a strange contrast to the prevailing strictness of religious principle. A glance through the Kirk Session records of any parish will show under what influences Burns's ideas on this subject were formed, and will go far to explain, if not to excuse, the actions of one swayed by passions so strong and irresistible. In his love-affairs, in his freedom of speech, in his later hard drinking, Burns was a child of his times, and if an honest statement of the facts is necessary for a true understanding of his work, it is only because much of his poetry is so intensely personal and introspective. Many of his associates, even of those who gave evidence against him, were not free from the same faults, but they wrote nothing to keep them alive as witnesses against them.

For his offence Burns was publicly rebuked in church—an incident which may, as much as anything, have given the first incentive to those fierce attacks on orthodoxy that were soon to make him famous. He

had already classed himself and John Rankine as "unregenerate heathen," contrasted with those godly folks who wrapped themselves in the holy robe of Hypocrisy. Even in his earlier days he had assailed Calvinism in a way that raised against him the "hue and cry of heresy," and in Irvine had acquired "more liberal opinions" in religion. In the feud between the Auld and the New Lichts there was little doubt which side Burns would take. His patron, Gavin Hamilton, was also with good reason opposed to the rigid Calvinists, and his support might thus be reckoned on. Accordingly, the first of his poems which became public property (in manuscript) was *The Twa Herds*, a burlesque lamentation for an ill-advised quarrel between two ministers of the district, in which his strong vein of personal satire first begins to appear. This was soon followed by the far more powerful *Holy Willie's Prayer*, the most profanely humorous piece that Burns ever penned.

It was now that the rhymer became a poet, and it is by the productions of the next sixteen months, from the beginning of 1785 to April 1786, that his name has been firmly established as that of Scotland's greatest poet. During that period some thirty of his best-known poems were composed, including such masterpieces as the *Epistle to Davie*, *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, *The Holy Fair*, *Halloween*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *The Twa Dogs*, and *The Vision*. On these poems alone the reputation of Burns might well rest, apart from the different note struck in his songs.

One may suspect that this brilliant series of productions was not wholly without an object. Probably before the close of 1785 Burns had conceived the idea

of appearing before the world as a poet. The farm had proved a failure, and the brothers were on the point of giving it up. Where he might go next was uncertain, but he could at least leave a memory behind him in his poems. It is doubtful, however, how far the design of publishing was quite decided on before a new complication arose in his tangled affairs.

Jean Armour.

In 1784 apparently, Burns had made the acquaintance of Jean Armour, daughter of a respectable mason in Mauchline, and one of the "proper young belles" celebrated in his verses. In the poems of 1785 there are several references to her, and in the beginning of 1786, about the time that the resolution to abandon the farm was come to, it became apparent that their love had been both fond and foolish. Under the circumstances it was impossible for Burns to settle down in life, and he foresaw nothing but exile. "Against two things," he wrote, "I am as fixed as fate—staying at home, and owning her conjugally." In spite of this and stronger language, he soon made a written acknowledgment of marriage with the girl, and proposed to go to Jamaica and there endeavour to provide a home. The announcement of all this to Jean's father not only distressed him deeply, but failed to meet with his approval. He was fond of his child, and probably thought it no credit to have Burns as a son-in-law, while a husband in Jamaica was fully worse than none at all. He insisted that the written engagement be given up to be cancelled, and Jean yielded. How the destruction of the paper could alter the fact of the marriage is hard to see, but her acquiescence cut Burns to the heart. *The Lament* and *Despondency* are the out-pourings of the first pangs of grief for this unhappy ending of his love. His misery nearly fitted

him for a madhouse. In a strange letter,* written in April 1786, he says, "There is a pretty large portion of Bedlam in the composition of a poet at any time; but on this occasion I was nine parts and nine-tenths out of ten stark staring mad. At first, I was fixed in stuporific insensibility, silent, sullen, staring, like Lot's wife besaltified in the plains of Gomorrha." To read this marvellous piece of burlesque, and then turn to *The Lament* of a few weeks before, is to pass through whole hemispheres of feeling, opposite to each other as the poles, yet both perfectly natural to Burns.

To Jamaica he was bent on going, but before taking the final step he was advised to publish his poems. The advice was congenial, for he was himself convinced of the merits of his work. "I can truly say," he wrote after his winter in Edinburgh, "that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and my works as I have at this moment. . . . I was pretty sure my poems would meet with some applause." Accordingly on April 3 of this year he writes that he is just about to send to the Press his proposals for publishing, and this is the last occasion on which he writes his name *Burness*†; so near was it to coming before the world in this form, instead of the familiar monosyllable.

It was only a few days later that Armour persuaded Mr. Aiken of Ayr, who "read" Burns into fame, to mutilate the marriage paper. "Would you believe it?" wrote Burns, "though I had not a hope nor even a wish to make her mine after her conduct, yet when

* To Mr. John Arnot of Dalquhatswood, who was not even an acquaintance of his.

† Except in writing to his Montrose relative, who used that form of the name.

he told me the names were cut out of the paper, my heart died within me, and he cut my veins with the news. Perdition seize her falsehood!"

That same evening the printed subscription forms reached the poet; only one copy of them is now known to exist, and runs thus:—

PROPOSALS FOR PUBLISHING BY SUBSCRIPTION

SCOTTISH POEMS BY ROBERT BURNS.

The work to be elegantly printed, in one volume octavo. Price, stitched, Three Shillings.* As the Author has not the most distant mercenary view in publishing, as soon as so many subscribers appear as will defray the necessary expense, the work will be sent to the Press.†

To the results of this appeal he looked forward "with fear and trembling."

If the letter to Mr. Arnot shows one aspect of Burns's fluctuating feelings with regard to Jean Armour, a still stranger one is evinced in the story of Highland Mary. The real facts in connection with this episode were studiously disguised by Burns himself, carefully passed over by Currie, and misunderstood by later biographers. It is now‡ well established that the "pretty long tract of the most ardent reciprocal attachment," which Burns speaks of as having fallen "in my very early life before I was

Highland Mary. 1786.

* The latest price paid for a copy was £121 (1896).

† A verse from Allan Ramsay is added.

‡ Since 1850, when Mr. Scott Douglas made known his discovery in a paper read to the Society of Antiquaries. Mrs. Begg afterwards admitted that the fact was well known to the Burns family.

known at all in the world," really covered this very period. Mary Campbell (Burns never told her name) was a native of Campbelton, who in July 1785 entered the service of Gavin Hamilton as a nursemaid. In his house no doubt Burns got to know her, and now, smarting under his treatment by Jean and her family, he centred all his love and hopes on his "Highland Lassie." "We met by appointment on the second Sunday of May (May 14, 1786) in a sequestered spot by the banks of Ayr, where we spent the day in taking a farewell, before she should embark for the West Highlands, to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life." The parting scene is familiar from Cromek's account of it (perhaps got from Gavin Hamilton), and the pictures this has inspired. Pity that it could not in strict truth have been kept to the poet's "very early years," for fact, if stranger, is not always so fair as fiction. Next day Mary set out for her home, and on the same day Burns, being in a sententious mood, penned his well-known *Epistle to a Young Friend*, in which he advises him to

> "Still keep something to yoursel',
> Ye scarcely tell to ony."

In the matter of Highland Mary, the poet, so seldom inclined to "reck the rede" he gave, certainly took his own lines to heart. It is hard, however, to fathom this affair, which only shaped itself into perfect music in after years. In the songs addressed to Mary at this time there is none of the clear starlight of *To Mary in Heaven;* it was a love that grew with death:—

> "Time but the impression stronger makes,
> As streams their channels deeper wear."

Meanwhile Jean Armour had been away at Paisley,

from which she returned on June 9, and the old spell was over him again. After Highland Mary, solemn parting, secret betrothal, and plans for the future, three days of Jean Armour's presence suffices for the following:—"Never man loved or rather adored a woman more than I did her; and to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, though I won't tell her so if I were to see her, which I don't want to do."

The Kirk Session next did its duty—one not likely to endear it to Burns—and he complied all the more readily with its discipline, that he was promised a certificate of being a bachelor. Apparently he really believed that the Kirk could thus absolve him from his irregular marriage, which was almost certainly binding in Common Law.

Before this (on June 13) the Press had begun its work. During its progress some additional pieces were probably composed—the *Dedication to Gavin Hamilton*, and *A Bard's Epitaph*, in which Burns took an impartial estimate of himself, the gist of whole volumes of biography—

> "The poor inhabitant below,
> Was quick to learn and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow
> And softer flame;
> But thoughtless follies laid him low,
> And stain'd his name."

The poet had openly avowed his intention of using any profit from his poems to enable him to emigrate to Jamaica. Knowing this, the Armours raised a process against him to find security for the maintenance of Jean's offspring. This action of theirs compelled him to seek retirement, which he found with a relative in Old

Rome Forest near Kilmarnock. Within three weeks from the end of July he expected to set sail for Jamaica, but on the last day of that month began the issue of the volume that was to keep him in Scotland for life. This thin octavo volume contains less than fifty pieces, but these comprise all the poems on which Burns's reputation rests, with the exception of *Death and Doctor Hornbook* and *The Brigs of Ayr*, first printed in the Edinburgh edition, *Tam o' Shanter*, not written till 1790, and *The Jolly Beggars* and *Holy Willie's Prayer*, which he never published. The preface, if not brilliant, is at least marked by modesty and honest feeling.

The First Edition. 1786.

Six hundred copies were printed, but so popular did the work become, and so eagerly was it bought up, that in a month or so the edition was exhausted. The book procured him almost immediately some warm admirers in higher society, such as Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, afterwards his frequent correspondent. The effect produced on the general public is best described by Robert Heron. "Old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant,—all were alike delighted, agitated, transported. I was at that time resident in Galloway, contiguous to Ayrshire, and I can well remember how that even ploughboys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages which they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted for necessary clothing, if they might but procure the works of Burns." The day of the Gentle Shepherd was past, and "the glorious dawnings of the poor, unfortunate Fergusson" were outshone by a clearer, fiercer sun.

The middle of August came, and the start for Jamaica was still in abeyance,—put off now till Sep-

tember 1. The sale of his poems put some £20 in his pocket (apparently it ought to have been a larger sum), and nine guineas of this were promptly expended in pre-paying a passage to the West Indies. But it was not to be: on September 3 he was still at home, and attended forenoon service at Mauchline church, where he was provided with material for a slight piece of satire, *The Calf*. At that very hour Jean Armour became the mother of twins, although it was evening before the intimation of this reached Burns at Mossgiel.

On the day following this, Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, had written from Edinburgh to Dr. Lawrie, minister of Loudoun, warmly praising the poems which had just been read to him. To this letter Burns afterwards attributed his journey to Edinburgh. "The Doctor belonged to a class of critics for whose applause I had not even dared to hope. His idea, that I would meet with every encouragement for a second edition, fired me so much that away I posted for Edinburgh without a single acquaintance in town, or a single letter of recommendation in my pocket."

Here, however, at a distance of ten crowded months, the poet epitomizes too much; his action was not so prompt as his words would imply. A visit to Kilmarnock about the middle of September is apparently responsible for *Tam Samson's Elegy*, and about the same time *The Brigs of Ayr* must have been composed. At the end of the month the date of his departure was still uncertain. A new edition of the poems was suggested, but the printer refused to go on with it, unless Burns would advance the price of the paper (£27), which the poet had no means of doing.

Not long after this—apparently on October 20—Highland Mary, who had come to Greenock to meet her betrothed, died before Burns had even heard of her illness. They must have corresponded, one would think, during her absence from Ayrshire, but no letters have been preserved, nor does Burns, in any communication of that period, make the slightest allusion to his engagement with her. What might have happened had she lived is hard to say. Jean Armour was close at hand, and Mary Campbell was a long way off, and it was hardly in Burns's nature to be satisfied with an ideal love at a distance, if there could be an actual one in bodily presence. In fact, one might suspect that Jean's sojourn at Paisley was largely responsible for Mary's sway in Burns's heart.

Death of Highland Mary.

While Mary lay in death at Greenock, the poet enjoyed that "ne'er-to-be-forgotten day" when he first "dinner'd wi' a Lord," an experience which opened the eyes of the author of *The Twa Dogs* not a little. This was at Catrine, the Ayrshire residence of Professor Dugald Stewart, whose impressions of Burns at that time are often quoted. "His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth; but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him; and listened with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of

his ordinary acquaintance, and his dread of anything approaching to meanness or servility, rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard."

The Excise.

On this occasion Burns had evidently mentioned his ambition of becoming an exciseman. The first hint of this appears in a letter to his "friend and benefactor," Mr. Aiken, about the beginning of October. As yet the idea was a faint one; there was so much that seemed to demand that if a new start in life was to be made, it should be made in a new country, "across the Atlantic's roar." But such an exile was bitterness of heart to him, and he grew more attached to the prospect of a post in the Excise. This seems to have been at least part of the business which now took him to Edinburgh, though we may well believe that the literary reason ranked as high with him. His friends in Ayr, Aiken and Ballantine, evidently took much interest in the proposed second edition of his poems, but advised him to bring it out in the Scottish capital. With this in view, Burns set out for Edinburgh on November 27, nearly three months after the letter from Dr. Blacklock, to which he ascribed the moving impulse. With his arrival there, a new period of his life begins; the young farmer was to take his place among the great men of his country, and hold his own with the brilliant group of *literati* then assembled in the capital.

CHAPTER II.

EDINBURGH.

ARRIVED in Edinburgh, Burns lost no time in seeking such noble patronage as he had access to. In Ayrshire he had been introduced to Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield, who now brought him under the notice of his cousin, the Earl of Glencairn. The latter received the poet in such a way as made him his patron's humble worshipper for life. "The noble Earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being whose image he so richly bears."* The result of this noble patronage was to bring Burns into immediate prominence among the best society of the metropolis. Before he had been there ten days, he writes thus to Gavin Hamilton: "I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan; and you may expect henceforth to see my birthday inserted among the wonderful events in the Poor Robins' and Aberdeen Almanacks, along with the Black Monday, and the battle of Bothwell Bridge." Thus did the poet jestingly anticipate what has since become sober fact, even beyond his wildest imaginings. —"My Lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr. H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and by

* The same extreme admiration appears in the *Verses intended to be written below a Noble Earl's picture*; one cannot wonder that Glencairn did not consent to their publication.

all probability I shall soon be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man of the world."

Other titled patrons he had—the Duchess of Gordon, Sir John Whiteford, and Lord Monboddo, whose beautiful daughter, Elizabeth Burnet, awaked his intense admiration. "There has not been anything nearly like her in all the combinations of Beauty, Grace and Goodness, the Great Creator has formed since Milton's Eve on the first day of her existence." Learned men, too, were among his friends, such as Professor Stewart, Dr. Blair, and Mr. Mackenzie. The latter, whose *Man of Feeling* Burns had once worshipped,—its tearful emotions being so much an image of his own—was directed to the poet's works by Dugald Stewart, and by his critique in *The Lounger* of December 9, did much to establish the literary fame of the Ayrshire bard. Three numbers also of Sibbald's *Edinburgh Magazine* gave extracts from the Kilmarnock volume, with appreciative remarks which Burns gratefully acknowledged.

The second edition of the poems was soon arranged for, it being undertaken by William Creech, then the leading publisher in Edinburgh. The poet's titled friends spared no efforts to secure subscribers, and the author was the hero of the hour. What his appearance was, and how he deported himself in his new surroundings, we know from various accounts by eye-witnesses—Dugald Stewart, Josiah Walker, and Sir Walter Scott, then a boy of fifteen. These accounts, so often quoted, bear out the remarkable way in which the young Ayrshire farmer, hitherto used to no higher society than country lawyers, ministers, and lairds, could command the respect and admiration of the most noble and talented of his countrymen. On the

ladies of the company he made even a greater impression, his instinctive homage to the fair sex softening that authoritative manner which the gentlemen noted as one mark of defective culture.

Yet during all this mingling with the gay world, Burns was living in a humble way with an old Mauchline friend, John Richmond, who occupied a room in Baxter's Close, Lawnmarket. Richmond paid three shillings a week for the room, and from this Burns went out to meet the highest society of Edinburgh, to astonish them with his knowledge of many subjects, and his eloquent originality on every point that interested him. From the testimony of all who knew him, his conversation was even more remarkable than his poetry.

It was a wonderful triumph, but it could not last in this form, and Burns was too clear-headed not to know it. Even in December 1786, he wrote: "Various concurring circumstances have raised my fame as a poet to a height which I am absolutely certain I have not merits to support, and I look down on the future as I would into the bottomless pit." Those well-meaning souls, who thought it their duty to warn him against being dazzled by his sudden fame, were assured in his replies that their advice was needless,*—he had, in Horace's words, "measured himself with his own foot-rule."

For poetry he was now too busy. Except the *Address to Edinburgh*, "chiefly remarkable," says Lockhart, "for the grand stanzas on the Castle and Holyrood," the first month in the capital is barren,† nor do

* See his letters to Mrs. Dunlop (January 15, 1787), Dr. Lawrie (February 5), and Dr. Moore (February 15).

† The lines *To a Haggis* first appear at this date, but they look

the succeeding ones make a much better show. Here again Burns was not deceived, and wrote to Dr. Lawrie on February 5, 1787—"I had been at a good deal of pains to form a just, impartial estimate of my intellectual powers before I came here: I have not added, since I came to Edinburgh, anything to the account." It is strange that Dr. Blacklock, to whose good opinion of his poetry he attributed his journey to Edinburgh, remained unvisited until a letter from Dr. Lawrie, towards the end of December, reminded the poet of his duty in that respect.

Several persons at this time considered themselves called upon to offer Burns advice as to the future bent of his poetry. The Earl of Buchan wrote him (February 1, 1787), advising him to visit the great scenes of Scottish history and catch inspiration from them. The poet's answer is couched in a strain probably as close to sarcasm as he could venture to adopt towards an Earl. He pictures his "delighting enthusiastic reveries" broken off by the "long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom" of Wisdom, which reminds him of the consequences of his zigzagging course in the past. "Now that your dear-loved Scotia, about whom you make such a racket, puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin?" Pride, if nothing else, recalls him to a life of independence. "I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic Muse in my wonted way, at the plough-tail."*

His presence in Edinburgh recalled to him his dear-

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l'k an older theme, though perhaps later than the Kilmarnock edition.

* Compare his letter to Mrs. Dunlop of March 22, 1787.

loved Fergusson, whose poems had been the moving inspiration of so much that was best in his own work, and whose sad end called forth his deepest sympathy.

> "O thou, my elder brother in misfortune,
> By far my elder brother in the Muses."

Allan Cunningham, probably romancing as usual, tells how Burns, within a few days of his reaching Edinburgh, "found his way to the lonely grave of Fergusson, and, kneeling down, kissed the sod." At any rate, on February 6, 1787, he wrote to the Bailies of the Canongate, offering to erect a stone on the grave of Fergusson, "the so justly celebrated poet, a man whose talents for ages to come will do honour to our Caledonian name." The permission was granted, and the stone erected, though not for two years after this, and it was the beginning of 1792 before it was paid for.

If the great men of Edinburgh were calmly taking stock of Burns, he had his revenge in noting down his private impressions of some of them, in a diary begun in April 1787.* The design of sketching the characters of those who interested him, *sine ira et studio*, was not carried very far, the only persons analysed being Dr. Blair and his colleague Dr. Greenfield (in connection with whom Burns once "put his foot in it"), Professor Stewart, and Creech the publisher. The cool criticism of Blair would have greatly surprised that elegant professor of *belles lettres*, and might have sensibly diminished the self-complacency with which he lectured Burns, in a letter sent to him on the eve of his leaving Edinburgh.

* Part of these remarks was printed by Currie; the rest was given up as lost, but the MS. was in existence all the time, and was made public in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1879. See Scott Douglas's edition, vol. vi. p. 387.

All this time the printing of his poems had been going on. Early in the year the Caledonian Hunt, being informed that Burns had dedicated the new edition of his poems to them, decided to subscribe for one hundred copies at five shillings each. Curiously enough, Burns had heard, nearly a month before, that all the members had subscribed, and were to pay one guinea each! The list of subscribers for the volume, which was finally ready for issue on April 18, contains some 1500 names, taking up 2800 copies. "Full justice," says Chambers, "has never been done to the Scottish public of that day for its liberality to Burns. Instead of being cold towards him, or refusing to help him up from the lowly and embarrassed circumstances in which nature and fortune had placed him, there was a burst of generous enthusiasm in his favour, and he met with an amount of patronage perhaps unprecedented in Britain since the days of Pope's *Iliad*." Many of the subscribers paid liberally for their copies, and Creech purchased the copyright for £100, so that Burns could foresee a large ultimate profit from the work. Apparently Creech must have reprinted to some extent to supply a large demand outside of the subscription list, and a London edition appeared in the same year, by arrangement with Mr. Cadell. Both of these editions contained the author's portrait, engraved by Beugo after Nasmyth's painting, but also with the aid of sittings from the poet. The old Kilmarnock preface was dropped for a more ambitious Dedication to the Caledonian Hunt, the members of which he approaches neither to thank them for past favours nor looking for a continuation of them. "I was bred to the plough, and am independent." There is just a suspicion of trying to reconcile opposites in

Edinburgh Edition. 1787.

the production. The volume contained all the pieces that had appeared in the Kilmarnock edition,* and was enriched by such others as *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, *The Brigs of Ayr*, *Address to the Unco Guid*, and *Tam Samson's Elegy*, together with some of the religious poetry of the Irvine period, and one or two songs, including *My Nannie, O*, and *Green grow the rashes.*

The work of the Press being now over, and his poems finding their way over the length and breadth of the land, and even to the Continent, Burns also began to think of leaving Edinburgh. On May 5 he set out for a Border tour, accompanied by Mr. Robert Ainslie. The route lay by Dunse, near which Ainslie's family lived; Coldstream, where Burns for the first time stood on English ground; Kelso, Jedburgh, marked in the diary of the tour as the scene of some harmless love-making, when a pretty face thawed his heart "into melting pleasure after being so long frozen up in the Greenland Bay of indifference, amid the noise and nonsense of Edinburgh." Then back by Kelso to Melrose, and finally down to the coast at Berwick, and up to Dunbar. Another visit to Dunse, where he was taken extremely ill, and scared by forebodings of death into good resolutions soon forgotten, was followed by an excursion into England. Apparently some believed that he was on his way to London, but he was content with visiting Newcastle and Carlisle,† from which he turned back to Annan, and thence to Dumfries, to examine the farms on the estate of Dalswinton, one of which had been offered

Border Tour. May 1787.

* Except the three sarcasms on the Campbells of Netherplace.

† The journal of the tour was only partly given by Currie, and first published in full by Cunningham.

him in January by Mr. Peter Miller, brother to the Lord Justice Clerk, who had lately acquired the property. This tour on classic Border ground produced no immediate results in poetry, beyond the burlesque lament for Creech, which is of little poetic worth. On June 8 he finally arrived at Mauchline, which he had left little more than six months before, but much had happened within that time.

Still the great problem remained to be solved. What was he to do to make a livelihood? "I cannot settle to my mind. Farming, the only thing of which I know anything, and heaven knows but little do I understand of that, I cannot, dare not risk on farms as they are. If I do not fix I will go for Jamaica." So quickly was the poet brought back from the glory of Edinburgh to face the cares of his old surroundings, and to land in the same mire of uncertainty in which he had been sunk before. Even the admiring reception given him by his fellow-villagers annoyed him. The stateliness of Edinburgh nobles was scarcely more irritating than the servility of his old acquaintances. Chief among those who offended him in this way were the Armours, though with Jean herself he lost no time in renewing the old acquaintance. To the embittered poet Milton's Satan appeared a model of magnanimity and independence to be imitated by himself just then. It may have been irritation at this, or restlessness after the excitement of Edinburgh, or a desire to visit Highland Mary's grave at Greenock—all these have been conjectured—that led him, in the latter part of June, after only a fortnight at home, to make an excursion to the West Highlands, of which little is known, save that it extended as far as Inverary. His letters regarding it mainly refer to "running a drunken race on the side

of Loch Lomond with a wild Highlandman," from which he did not escape unscathed.

Throughout July Burns was still at home, having as yet "fixed on nothing with regard to the serious business of life: I am just as usual a rhyming, mason-making, aimless, idle fellow." On August 2 was written the long letter to Dr. Moore which is so valuable for the early history of his life.* On the 7th of the month he was back in Edinburgh, this time, however, with no definite aim in view, except, perhaps, to settle with Creech, and to set out for a Highland tour with his friend William Nicol, classical teacher in the High School, a man of coarse and violent temper, with "a confounded strong in-kneed sort of a soul," yet with some qualities that attracted Burns.

After freeing himself from the results of an escapade of the previous winter, he set out for the Highlands along with Nicol on August 25. The Journal of the tour shows a good deal of observation. Bannockburn awoke an enthusiasm rather turgidly expressed in the diary. At Stirling, after seeing the ruinous state of the old hall in the castle, Burns wrote on a window in the inn some lines about the Stuarts and their successors, which excited not a little public indignation, and caused him trouble later on. On August 31 the travellers reached Blair Athole, where Burns was invited to supper with the family of the duke. A full account of his visit is given by Josiah Walker. In return for the hospitality shown him, from which the jealous Nicol

Highland Tour. Aug.—September, 1787.

* The letter was not actually sent until September 23, when he returned from his Highland tour. He had a copy with him, which was shown to the Duchess of Athole and others.

tore him away, Burns composed his poem on the Falls of Bruar.

The route then lay over the Grampians, down Speyside, and so on to Inverness. From here the Falls of Foyers were visited and sketched in verse. By way of Culloden, Nairn, Forres, and Elgin, they came to Fochabers, where the poet paid a visit to Gordon Castle. His reception there was of the kindest, but Nicol, who had hurried him away from Blair, behaved even worse here, and his call was extremely short, a fact that he afterwards deeply regretted.

By Banff and Peterhead to Aberdeen, on to Stonehaven, where he met some of his relatives, then by Montrose to Dundee and Perth, and so through Kinross to Queensferry—such was the journey of twenty-two days, covering some 600 miles. On the evening of September 16 he was again in Edinburgh. Despite the haste and the temper of his companion, Burns enjoyed the tour, though it may be doubted whether the desolate grandeur of the Highland landscapes really appealed to him. Wooded valleys, fertile carses and waterfalls are the scenes he appears mainly to have admired. Yet the new experience was not without its effect upon him. "My journey through the Highlands was perfectly inspiring, and I hope I have laid in a good stock of new poetical ideas from it." A number of Highland airs had taken his fancy, and it was from this time that he began to write verses for old Scottish tunes, otherwise it would be difficult to point to any "new poetical ideas" derived from the journey.

Other excursions he made during the autumn, round by Linlithgow and Stirling again to Gavin Hamilton's relatives in Clackmannanshire, among whom Margaret

Chalmers had a special attraction for him. By her own account, as reported by the poet Campbell, Burns made a serious proposal of marriage to her. Thence he visited the scenery on the Devon, and proceeded as far east as Dunfermline. Again he went to Ochtertyre, in Strathearn, the seat of Sir William Murray, perhaps on some errand connected with the excise; and to Auchtertyre on the Teith, the residence of the scholarly Mr. Ramsay. These tours, however, were over by October 20, and Burns then settled down in Edinburgh for another winter in the house of Mr. W. Cruickshank, a colleague of Nicol in the High School.

During his previous residence in the capital he had made the acquaintance, though very slightly, of Mr. James Johnson, an engraver, who had ventured upon the publication of a collection of Scottish songs with music. Into this design Burns entered with great eagerness; and while the first volume (published in May 1787) had contained only one or two pieces from his hand, the second, which appeared in February 1788, was enriched with his first great outburst of lyric verse, henceforward destined to be the chief form of his poetry. Several of the songs given in this volume are the direct result of the Highland tour. Others are of a much earlier date. Besides his own songs, however, Burns was diligent in searching out and preserving all scraps of old songs and music. "I have been absolutely crazed about it," he writes in October of this year, "collecting old stanzas and every information remaining respecting their authors, origin, etc." To another he writes, "I have collected, begged, borrowed, and stolen all the songs I could meet with." These old fragments he

Johnson's Museum.

mended and made fit for decent society, adding verses where necessary, all in such a masterly way as to make his services to the old popular songs of Scotland only second in value to his own original work.

His other poetry at the time was slight enough. A *Birthday Ode for 31st December* (the birthday of Prince Charles Edward) is intensely Jacobite, and little more, while its extravagant tone also appears in the elegy *On the Death of Robert Dundas.* The latter was sent to the son of the deceased, who took no notice of it, an oversight that Burns deeply resented, and ever remembered "with gnashing of teeth."

The expected settlement with Creech had not yet taken place, and Burns was apparently preparing to leave Edinburgh in the beginning of December, when, on a Saturday afternoon, a fall from a coach bruised one of his knees so severely as to confine him to the house for several weeks, and prevented him from going about freely for some three months. The effects, indeed, were more lasting. In December 1788, he writes, "My knee, I believe, will never be entirely well." The incident, however, would be trivial enough but for a new love-affair, and the extraordinary series of letters to which it gave rise. On the very evening of his accident Burns had intended to call on a lady, whose acquaintance he had made only a few days before.

Clarinda.

This was a Mrs. McLehose (*née* Agnes Craig), whose husband was in Jamaica, caring nothing for his wife; while she, possessed of no little beauty and intelligence, felt that in Burns she had found her ideal. The poet, too, seems to have been captivated by her charms at first sight, and being unable to visit her, he wrote to her a series of letters

of the most extravagant kind. Whether the sentiments on his part were altogether genuine may be doubted; on hers they certainly were. Yet that he had a passion of some kind for Clarinda, as he styled her, is patent enough. To his old friend, Richard Brown, he wrote on December 30, "Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom: and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow." After the New Year, when he was again able to be out, came various interviews, which seem on Burns's part to have been as warm as his correspondence. Yet, in little more than a year after, he somewhat ungallantly credits himself with "the conduct of an honest man, struggling successfully with temptations the most powerful that ever beset humanity, and preserving untainted honour in situations where the austerest virtue would have forgiven a fall."

"Almighty love," however, could not prevent other considerations from pressing on him. Creech would not settle accounts, and the gloomiest thoughts filled his mind. "God have mercy on me! a poor, damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool, the sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!" Under these circumstances Burns, in casting about for some plan in life, reverted to his old idea of entering the Excise, in which he was encouraged and assisted by his medical attendant, Dr. Wood. His applications to Graham of Fintry and the Earl of Glencairn were penned some time in January, but he found it was not all plain sailing. "I have almost given up the Excise idea," he writes to Clarinda on January 27. "I have been just now to wait on a great person . . .

I have been questioned like a child about my matters, and blamed and schooled for my inscription on the Stirling window." Thus did his Jacobitism, which was more a sentiment than a serious conviction, tend to damage his interests, as his politics did in later years. For the present it was no serious bar to his design, and by February 17 he writes that he has entered the Excise, "after mature deliberation." It seemed the only course open to him. "I was not likely to get anything to do. I wanted *un bût*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread; and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life."

Leaving Edinburgh on February 18, and travelling by way of Glasgow and Kilmarnock, Burns reached home on the twenty-third. Immediately thereafter, accompanied by his father's friend, John Tennant of Glenconner, he proceeded to Dumfries to inspect Mr. Miller's farms, and was advised to select Ellisland. This unsettled his resolution to stick to the Excise. "I have the two plans of life before me," he writes to Clarinda, "and I wish to adopt the one most likely to procure me independence."

At this point Jean Armour again comes upon the stage of Burns's life. In Edinburgh he had virtually engaged himself to Clarinda; in Mauchline he found his old love about to become a mother for the second time. The romance of the capital fitted in awkwardly with the annals of the parish. During the winter Jean had been turned out of her father's house, and Burns had procured her a shelter with William Muir, the

miller at Tarbolton. He now lodged her in Mauchline, after a visit to her, his impressions of which are recorded in a letter to Clarinda. "I am disgusted with her—I cannot endure her." He found in her only "tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning . . . I have done with her, and she with me." In another letter to Ainslie, there is a strain of burlesque, painfully reminding us of the one to Arnot on the events of March, 1786,—two years before. About March 13 twin girls were born, who only lived a few days.

By this time Burns was again in Edinburgh, where he signed the lease of Ellisland on March 13, obtained an order from the Board of Excise to be instructed in his profession, and settled accounts with Creech. Of that gentleman he conceived some very strong opinions, and had not forgiven him nine months later. "I could, not a tale, but a detail unfold; but what am I that I should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh?" The exact sum which he finally received from his publisher cannot now be ascertained, but apparently it was about £500. Of this he afterwards gave £180 to Gilbert, to enable him to keep on the farm at Mossgiel. "I give myself no airs for this," he wrote to Dr. Moore, "for it was mere selfishness on my part; I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*."

After some interviews with Clarinda he again left Edinburgh on March 22, to look forward to settling at Ellisland, and begin the laborious life he had been so little used to of late. "I determine . . . poesy must

be laid aside for some time: my mind has been vitiated by idleness, and it will take a good deal of effort to habituate it to the routine of business."

He first went home in order to get his Excise instructions carried out before Whitsunday, and now beyond the immediate spell of Clarinda, his affections began to revert to Jean Armour. On April 7 he writes to Miss Chalmers, "I have lately made some sacrifices, for which, were I *viva voce* with you to paint the situation and recount the circumstances, you would applaud me." The first plain intimation of the step he had taken is in a letter to his friend James Smith of April 28. "There is a certain clean-limbed, handsome, bewitching young hussy of your acquaintance, to whom I have lately and privately given a matrimonial title to my corpus." A month later he announces the marriage to Johnson in not the most delicate language, after which he proceeds—"To be serious, I found that I had a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my hands; and though Pride and seeming Justice were murderous King's Advocates on the one side, yet Humanity, Generosity and Forgiveness were such powerful, such irresistible counsel on the other side, that a Jury of all Endearments, and new attachments, brought in a unanimous verdict of *Not Guilty*." By this time Jean Armour was avowed to the world as Mrs. Burns, but evidently the poet was in no hurry to communicate the fact to all his friends, and the reasons subsequently alleged by him were perhaps not the primary ones. Over no step in his life have his biographers been more exercised than this. To Clarinda he did not attempt to defend himself for nearly a year, and then his defence is only "all the powerful circumstances that omnipotent necessity was busy laying in

wait for me," which is vague enough. To other correspondents he usually says that he could not trifle with "such a sacred deposit" as another's happiness for life,—a phrase which recurs time after time. Legally there can be little doubt that Burns was all the time married to Jean Armour, ever since he gave her the paper in the beginning of 1786.

CHAPTER III.

DUMFRIESSHIRE.

Ellisland. 1788-1791.

WHEN Burns arrived at Ellisland on June 13, 1788, there was much for him to do. A new house was needed, and until this was provided he could not bring his wife to the farm. The uncomfortable surroundings he now found himself in were by no means calculated to encourage him to persevere in the industrious course he had resolved on, and he was in no hopeful mood. He was "a solitary inmate of an old smoky *spence*, far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved. . . . Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind." In his Journal he is even more gloomy; "I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time, with Milton's Adam, gladly lay me in my mother's lap and be at peace." When on the same day he took a solemn farewell of all his "giddy follies" and "varnished vices," his intentions were better than his strength. To "sit and count his sins by chapters" was for him a profitless employment. He was much better occupied when in one of his "wonted rhymin' raptures" his fancy reverted to his

Jean in *Of a' the airts the winds can blaw*. In some ten days he was back at Mauchline, but only for a day or two; June 28 is the date of one of the copies of the verses composed in Friars' Carse Hermitage, to which he had received free access from his neighbour, Robert Riddell of Glenriddell. On July 10 he is back again in Ayrshire, where Jean was qualifying for a farmer's wife under the instruction of his mother and sisters. He had by this time convinced himself of his wisdom in marrying her. "I can easily *fancy* a more agreeable companion for my journey of life; but upon my honour, I have never seen the individual instance." Meanwhile he orders his Family Bible, along with Smollett's works, and jests with his bookseller, not in the most delicate style, on his becoming a *paterfamilias*. On August 5 he and Jean appeared before the Session, acknowledged their irregular marriage, and their sorrow for that irregularity, and desired that the marriage should be confirmed, Burns paying a guinea for the poor by way of fine.

This constant oscillation between Ellisland and Mauchline, distant forty-six miles from each other, was no doubt bad for Burns, as Currie says, by giving him an unsettled start on his farm. Dumfriesshire had in itself little to interest him. "I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country in any degree of perfection, are stupidity and canting. . . . They have as much idea of a rhinoceros as a poet. . . . I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my 'darling Jean,' and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my becobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-

wheel." Certainly the *Fête Champêtre* and the *Epistle to Graham of Fintry* have little of the master-hand about them.

The latter poem was accompanied by a letter more directly to the point (September 10, 1788). The farm, he says, would take some time before it would pay the rent. To Gilbert he had given all his surplus capital, and had nothing to fall back upon. He therefore asked to be appointed to the Excise division in which he lived. The post, he thought, would help him poetically as well as materially. "I am thinking of something in the rural way of the drama kind. Originality of character is, I think, the most striking beauty in that species of composition, and my wanderings in the way of my business would be vastly favourable to my picking up original traits of human nature." Later experience did not justify his anticipations, if these were really serious, but to his request he obtained a favourable answer, which reassured him for the time.

It was the first week of December ere Mrs. Burns came to Dumfriesshire, and even then the farm-house at Ellisland was still unfinished. Her first residence was at "The Isle," a romantic spot about a mile down the Nith. The next year (1789) was pretty well advanced when the pair entered on possession of Ellisland, and before this, in the end of February, Burns had been in Edinburgh, and had effected a settlement with Creech, whose dealings finally satisfied him. He did not see Clarinda, who had told Ainslie that she did not wish even to catch sight of him on the street. It was after his return, that on March 9 he wrote to her, offering a defence of his marriage, which is artistic if not ingenuous. Even this brief visit to the capital served

to renew his discontent with his sphere in life, and reawaken his jealousy of the rich. There were times when he tried to think himself happy as a farmer, and a letter to the town-clerk of Dumbarton gives an idyllic picture of his life as such. "I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy; and, at times, sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses—the only gipsies with whom I have now any intercourse." Yet in the same month he also writes, "For some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages."

Even the "gipsies" aforesaid were not very gracious to him just then, and the compositions of the first half of this year add but little to his work, most of them being in his new English style. Only in July came a flash of the old fire and humour in *The Kirk of Scotland's Alarm*, written to ridicule the ecclesiastical persecutors of Dr. McGill of Ayr, and the lines on Captain Grose. There are also one or two notable songs, such as *John Anderson* and *Tam Glen*, while *Willie brewed a peck o' maut* was the outcome of a meeting in autumn at Moffat, with Nicol and Allan Masterton. *The Whistle*, another bacchanalian composition of some spirit if small poetry, celebrates a drinking match in October of this year, at which, however, notwithstanding hard swearing to the contrary, Burns apparently was not present. A few days later, in all likelihood, saw the composition of *To Mary in Heaven*, of which striking details were given by Mrs. Burns. These have not passed unquestioned, and certainly all the circumstances

do not quite agree, but it would be strange if she had invented the whole story.

Excise appointment.

In August Burns had received an intimation from Mr. Graham that the Board of Excise had resolved to appoint him exciseman in his own district. His immediate object in this was to increase the chances of his farm being able to support himself and family. For the work itself he had no liking, but a wife and children were powerful incentives. In the *Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*, of October 21, amid some weak verses and expressions not of the happiest, there are lines of real feeling, which show his true purpose in taking this step:

> "To make a happy fireside clime
> To weans and wife,
> That's the true pathos and sublime
> Of human life."

The sentiments of the poem are echoed in several letters of the period. He was painfully conscious that his friends would think the position something of a descent, and he felt it necessary to apologize. To Lady Glencairn he wrote: "People may talk as they please of the ignominy of the Excise; £50 a-year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession." That he brought at least a good deal of humanity into his duties, is shown by the various anecdotes of his leniency recorded by Chambers.

* A letter to Mrs. Dunlop, of December 13, 1789, is the first occasion on which Burns says anything of his Mary, and he makes no further mention of her until 1792.

The duties of exciseman, while demanding constant absence from home, also bound him down to the district, which he could not leave, even for a visit to Ayrshire, without permission from Edinburgh. The result was not a happy one. Not only was the farm less likely to succeed than ever, but the Excise proved to be beyond his strength. Within a short time after beginning active duties, the hard work, riding two hundred miles each week, began to tell on him. He suffered from "the miseries of a diseased nervous system," and wrote to Mrs. Dunlop on the prospect of death, in his most exalted style. To Gilbert he writes in the beginning of 1790: "This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it." To make "one guinea do the business of three" was never Burns's strong point, and it was now needed more than at any other time.

In February 1790, the third volume of Johnson's *Museum* appeared, containing forty songs by Burns. He was still determined on higher flights, and in March he orders from Edinburgh copies of dramatists both old and new—Ben Jonson, Congreve, Wycherley, etc., and even Molière, Racine, Corneille and Voltaire in the original. He was preparing to write a drama on a rather unpromising subject—the story of how Rob M'Quechan ran his "elshin," or awl, nine inches into the heel of King Robert the Bruce while mending his boot. Yet the greater part of the year brought no more than an *Election Ballad* (connected with two of the previous year) and the *Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson*, an old Edinburgh theme taken up anew. Only towards the close of the year did Burns excel himself in *Tam o' Shanter*, written to accompany the

drawing of Alloway Kirk in Captain Grose's *Antiquities of Scotland.*

The *Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots*, in the beginning of 1791, pleased him "beyond any effort of my muse for a good while past." His noble patron, the Earl of Glencairn, also died in January of that year, and Burns lamented his death in tones worthy of his earlier muse, and resonant with the chords of *Man was made to mourn.*

His family was steadily increasing. A son had been born in August 1789, and a third came on April 9 of this year, whom he named after William Nicol. Ten days earlier a less welcome addition had been made by Anne Park, niece to the hostess of the Globe Tavern, Dumfries, and heroine of some of Burns's most luxurious verses, who on March 31 gave birth to a daughter, afterwards named Elizabeth Burns.* Such an event was all the more unwelcome that the farm had at last to be given up, many causes uniting to this end,—poverty of soil, want of management, the amount of waste and excess of hospitality. A bitter passage on the "children of dependence," in a letter written in June of this year, shows that many things were rankling in the poet's heart. He made arrangements to give up the farm, and in August his standing crops were sold by auction, bringing a fair price; "but such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country."

Before finally leaving Ellisland he paid his last visit to Edinburgh, where he had an interview with Clarinda, then about to join her husband in the West Indies. The parting took place on December 6, a parting immortalized in *Ae fond kiss and then we sever.* They

* These two children of the poet survived till 1872 and 1873 respectively.

met no more, though Clarinda was not long absent from the country.*

Burns was now to act as exciseman in Dumfries at a salary of £70, with hopes of rising in his profession. To Dumfries therefore he removed in December 1791, after three and a half years in Ellisland, in the soil of which lay buried the larger half of the profits of his poems. His home was now an upper flat of a small house in the Wee Vennel (the present Bank Street), but he enjoyed good society. Chief among his new acquaintances was Mr. Walter Riddell of Woodley Park, four miles to the south of Dumfries, and especially his very young and charming wife, Maria, who had a taste for literature and poetry.

Dumfries. 1792.

Little happened till late in the year. In August appeared Johnson's fourth volume, containing some fifty songs, either entirely or in part by Burns, among them being *Ae fond kiss; O for ane and twenty; Flow gently, Sweet Afton; The Whistle; The Posie; Kenmure's on and awa'; O leeze me on my spinnin' wheel*, and *Ye banks and braes o' Bonnie Doon.*

In September he was asked to assist in another work of the same nature as Johnson's, the chief mover in which was George Thomson, an Edinburgh musical amateur. The work was meant to be an advance on Johnson's in the elegance of both words and music. "We will esteem your poetical assistance a particular favour," wrote Thomson to Burns, "besides paying any reasonable

Thomson's songs. 1792.

* She returned in August 1792. Burns only heard of this later on, and in March 1793 wrote her a most extravagant letter, which he copied into his collection, excusing it as "the fustian rant of enthusiastic youth" (!).

price you shall please to demand for it." The poet replied at once, and accepted the former proposal with the utmost alacrity, on condition of not being hurried, and of being allowed to keep a Scottish element in his verses. "As to remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price, for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, etc. would be downright prostitution of soul." His contributions to Thomson's collection begin in the following month with *The Lea-rig*, and continue till within a few days of his death, being made all the more interesting by the preservation of the series of letters that accompanied them.

During 1792 sympathy with revolution politics had been rapidly spreading in the country, and Burns, who had all along admired the French nation, was unguarded in expressing his feelings on the subject. In December, information regarding this was given to his superiors by "some envious malicious devil," and Burns immediately appealed to his old friend Graham, of Fintry, to save him from the consequences. In this strongly-worded letter it is mainly the prospect of ruin to his family that inspires the writer; in a later one he enters more calmly into the subject. The accusation, although the storm blew over at the time, was one calculated to damage his chances of promotion, and to Mrs. Dunlop he promises amendment in the way of politics, as well as of hard drinking. "Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned; it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief,—

but even this I have more than half given over." The testimony of witnesses is at variance as to Burns's actual intemperance in the later years of his life,—the one side giving the lie to the other—but that he was too often at convivial parties can hardly be doubted, as even some of his defenders admit it.

In February 1793, a new edition of his poems appeared in two volumes. It contained only a score of pieces additional to those in the Edinburgh one of 1787, most of which have already been mentioned under their proper dates. The only song is one of eight lines, addressed to "Anna"*; all the rest of his lyric muse went to Johnson and Thomson.

At Whitsunday, 1793, Burns removed to a small detached house in the Mill Vennel, now Burns Street, a step which may indicate a favourable condition of finances. In July, when Thomson, on the appearance of the first part of his work, sent him five pounds, Burns blazed up in indignant remonstrance. "It degrades me in my own eyes. . . . As to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear by the HONOR which crowns the upright statue of ROBERT BURNS'S INTEGRITY—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the by-past transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you." It is strange, if true, that at this time Burns wrote to some of his friends for the loan of three or four guineas.

In the end of July he made an excursion through Galloway, and the spirited account of this given by his companion, John Syme, shows the poet in a most irritable mood, perhaps, as Chambers says, an indication of discontent with the times and with himself. The autumn of the year was fairly prolific in songs for

* Possibly written for his friend Cunningham.

Thomson's work, and later on he also finished the copying of his letters into one of the volumes now known as the Glenriddell MSS., preserved in the Athenæum Library, Liverpool. The other volume, containing poems then unpublished, had been written some time before.

Burns's good resolutions in the beginning of the year against hard drinking were not carried out. In January 1794, we find him nearly involved in a duel with a military officer because of proposing the toast, "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause." Little wonder that "some of our folks about the Excise Office, Edinburgh, had, and perhaps still have, conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken, dissipated character,"—even though Burns himself denied the accuracy of the conception. His friend Mr. Walter Riddell was perhaps not quite guiltless in the poet's excesses, and the result of some act of rudeness to Mrs. Riddell was an estrangement between her and Burns, who before this had been her devoted admirer. He at once tried reconciliation, in a letter full of remorse and bombast, but as neither this nor other overtures were successful, he finally vented his spleen in undeserved satire, of which, perhaps the *Epistle from Esopus to Maria* is the only one that has any merit. Helped, perhaps, by officious acquaintances, the breach was soon beyond all closing for the time. Its effect may be seen in the letter to Cunningham of February 25, in which he seeks to minister to his own "mind diseased" by reflections on his favourite topic, Religion, in a strain which Lockhart adduces as conclusive proof that Burns was not "ever a degraded being." Unfortunately the quarrel with the Riddells extended to the owner of

Friar's Carse, his former friend, and the two were not reconciled when Robert Riddell died on April 21. All the period seems to have been one of depression for Burns, and to it is probably to be assigned the anecdote, related by Lockhart, of how a friend found Burns on the shady side of the street, unnoticed by the gay gathering across the way, assembled for a country ball.

Not even the idea of Clarinda could rouse him to his old liveliness. A letter to her on June 25 is a tame conclusion to such a record of enthusiastic love,—a complaint of Ainslie's treatment of him, his practice of giving her name as a toast, and one of his insults to Mrs. Riddell are almost its only contents. When with autumn his songs begin again, Clarinda was only a "*ci-devant* goddess," and a new fair one had taken her place. It is now a Chloris that is the favoured one, a deity with blue eyes and flaxen hair, whose real name was Jean Lorimer, and who had in the previous year, at the age of eighteen, made a run-away marriage that soon left her worse than a widow. How far Burns was seriously involved with the beautiful and unfortunate woman it is impossible to say. Down to August 1795, she was his idol; by the next February he wrote to Thomson, "in my by-past songs I dislike one thing—the name Chloris. . . . What you mentioned of 'flaxen locks' is just, they cannot enter into an elegant description of beauty."

Chloris.

Josiah Walker has given an account of a visit he paid to Burns in the end of the year, in which he was a little disappointed. "Although," he says, "I discovered in his conduct no errors which I had not seen in men who stand high in the favour of society, or sufficient to account for the mysterious insinuations which I heard against his character."

About this time the proprietor of the London *Morning Chronicle* gave Burns the chance to become a regular contributor to that paper. The poet preferred his prospects in the Excise. Both positions he could not hold, and his family demanded the safest course. His outlook was brighter in the very last days of the year, and his "political sins" were condoned by a temporary appointment to a supervisorship. In February 1795, he produced a set of ballads on the parliamentary election for the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, in which he supported the candidature of Mr. Heron, of Kerroughtree, and libelled the leading gentry on the opposing side. These coming into Mr. Heron's hands, he wrote to Mr. Syme about the poet's interests, and the latter then addressed to him a letter full of the fairest visions of future ease and literary activity. In two or three years he would be a supervisor in the ordinary course of things. Patronage might then put him on the list of collectors, whose salaries ranged from £200 to £1000,—plenty to get and nothing to do. This was Burns's aim: "A life of literary leisure with a decent competence is the summit of my wishes."

To prove his loyalty to the Government he joined a volunteer company in Dumfries, and wrote a song containing some well-known lines, which at once obtained a wide popularity (*Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?*). But he was too much connected with the Whig party to attract ministerial favour by his verses, and his dreams of promotion were in no hurry to be realized.

The summer passed with no remarkable incident, bringing several songs, of which *Last May a braw wooer*, etc. is the best. Already his health was beginning to give way under the rapid life he had led. Even on

New Year's Day he had written to Mrs. Dunlop, that he already began to feel "the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame;"—and yet he was only 36. Ill-health and hard work may account for the almost complete cessation of his letters in the closing months of the year. Of this period scarcely any information can be gleaned, songs and everything have ceased.

"Upwards of a year before his death," says Currie, "there was an evident decline in our poet's personal appearance, and though his appetite continued unimpaired, he was himself sensible that his constitution was sinking. His temper now became irritable and gloomy; he fled from himself into society, often of the lowest kind." Currie's darker hints one may willingly pass over, though that biographer must have carefully assured himself of their truth. The repentance is seen in the rhymed note to Collector Mitchell, asking for the loan of a guinea, and promising reformation:—

> "Then farewell folly, hide and hair o't,
> For ance and aye!"

Soon after this comes the last poem in the old familiar metre, the epistle to Colonel De Peyster, in which his fast-running life is pathetically summed up:—

> "Dame Life, tho' fiction out may trick her,
> And in paste gems and frippery deck her,
> Oh! flickering, feeble, and unsicker
> I've found her still,
> Aye wavering, like the willow-wicker,
> 'Tween good and ill."

During the closing months of 1795 he was confined to the house, and began to go out again in January of the following year. A few days later he stayed at a

tavern-party till three in the morning, and is said to have fallen asleep in the snow on his way home. The chill brought back his rheumatism, and rendered him incapable of exertion. His letters and songs begin again with the opening months of the year, but they are short and scanty. Mrs. Dunlop had long been silent, and he writes to her in sorrowful remonstrance.* He was in straits for money, and was fain to borrow a guinea from one Clarke, a school-master in Forfar, whose cause he had once espoused in Dumfries. After six months' silence his correspondence with Thomson was resumed, but the second letter, in April, has only illness to tell of. In this constant state of ill-health he received the kind attentions of Jessie Lewars, sister of a brother-exciseman, whom he repaid by some complimentary verses, and by songs, of which the best known is *O wert thou in the cauld blast.*

On June 26 he again wrote to Clarke for a guinea, and a week later removed to Brow on the Solway Firth, ten miles from Dumfries, to try the effects of sea-bathing. His condition by this time was pitiable. "Besides my inveterate rheumatism, my appetite is quite gone, and I am so emaciated, as to be scarce able to support myself on my own legs." Mrs. Riddell, who had forgiven him by this time, saw him on the day after his arrival, and has given a feeling account of the interview. He showed great anxiety about his literary remains, particularly those which would tell against his reputation, and regretted that he had not put his papers in order before that time.

Within a week he was in the depths of despair. His

Mrs. Dunlop's sins of omission, wilful or not, were concealed by Gilbert Burns and Currie, who gave wrong dates to several of the poet's letters to her.

wife was approaching her confinement in Dumfries, and a creditor was pressing for payment of a bill. To Thomson he appealed for £5, being apprehensive of the horrors of a jail. With this went his last song, *Fairest Maid on Devon banks.* Thomson promptly sent the desired amount, which has not saved him from bitter attacks by some admirers of the poet, who think he ought to have sent more. No doubt Thomson remembered the letter of three years before. From his cousin, James Burness in Montrose, he asked for £10. This also came in due course, but of neither kindness was Burns then conscious. To Dumfries he was brought back, at his own request, on July 18, where he penned his last letter, one to summon his mother-in-law to attend his wife. For the rest of the time he was mainly delirious, and Thursday morning, July 21, saw the last hours of Scotland's greatest poet. Four days later, amid a vast concourse of townsmen and strangers, the mortal remains of Robert Burns were deposited with military honours in the churchyard of Dumfries.

CHAPTER IV.

POEMS.

THE Scottish poetry of Burns is the culmination of a literary movement which had begun some half a century before his birth, with writers like William Hamilton of Gilbertfield and Allan Ramsay. It is true that from at least the close of the fourteenth century Scotland had been in possession of a national poetic literature. The works of Barbour and Blind Harry, Henryson and Dunbar, Douglas and Lyndsay, with others of lesser note, form a native literature which, while it may not rise to the level of Chaucer, is far superior to the writings of any of his successors. This, however, is followed by a period of stagnation, setting in just when the English stream began to flow again in the Elizabethan writers; and when Scottish literature revives with the beginning of the eighteenth century it has entered on a new phase. The older poets had no influence outside of their own country; England probably knew few of them even by name; but just as Scotland had been politically united with the South, so Scottish literature becomes one with English, and gives it some of its most illustrious names. The work, however, of Thomson or Beattie, of Hume or Robertson, was English in form, and claimed correctness of style as well as originality of thought, and so these writers rank rather as English than as Scottish

authors. It was left for Burns, and for him alone, to raise his own dialect to a level with the literary tongue, and to take his place in the front rank of English literature, not in virtue of his English, but of his purely Scottish work. It was a feat that no poet had achieved before him, and in which no one has succeeded since.

The way for such an achievement was, naturally enough, paved by earlier workers in the same path, by the poems of Hamilton, of Ramsay, and of Fergusson, precursors and teachers whom Burns gratefully owned. These had found the Lowland tongue fallen from its high estate, the vehicle only of rude ballads and ruder songs, in which gleams of true poetry were obscured by a thick undergrowth of trivial and vulgar thoughts. They had tried to raise it to a higher place, to fit it for the expression of poetry and song, and for pioneers they had succeeded in no small degree. But models as they were to him, one will search their writings in vain for all that is characteristic of the poetry of Burns, for his fire, his satire, his tenderness, his humour. To them, and to many a nameless singer, he owed much of his literary form, much even of his matter, but making all allowances for this, there remains far more that is his own, and it is the highest part of his work. If it is unjust to Ramsay and to Fergusson to ignore their share in the making of Burns (an injustice that he was never guilty of), it is equally unfair to suggest that his reputation is in any way stolen from theirs. No borrowing of ideas will ever explain why Burns is an English classic, in a way that the others can never be. Here it is Homer that borrows from Virgil, the broad original mind from the narrower and more artificial.

In the poems of Burns there are two groups to be

distinguished, which faithfully answer to two stages in his literary training. In the first of these he is Scottish and natural, founding his work on that of earlier Scottish poets, and surpassing in his general level the highest reaches of their verse. In the second he has realized how much of his work was at variance with the prevailing tone of eighteenth-century English poetry, and tries to fit himself into what he conceives to be the true literary groove. But the vein is not his own, and he cannot work it with success; seldom does he bring pure ore out of it, except where older threads break out amid the new, in some isolated but brilliant instances.

Burns was born to be the poet of Scotland, not to add new forms or new ideas to the school of Pope and Thomson. It was for this that his whole early life fitted him; his very hardships lent their aid to that end. If they did not leave him with a "lean and hungry look," he had yet the other qualities of Cassius; he read much, he was a great observer, and his large and glowing eye looked right through the minds of men. Like Cassius, too, he was a patriot; Blind Harry had ensured that Scotland and Scottish independence should be to him a prejudice that was also an inspiration. Even his boyhood had felt the desire to realize this inspiration, a vague but burning wish

> "That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,
> Some usefu' plan or book could make,
> Or sing a sang at least.
> The rough burr-thistle, spreading wide
> Amang the bearded bear,
> I turn'd the weeder-clips aside,
> An' spared the symbol dear:
> No nation, no station
> My envy e'er could raise;
> A Scot still, but blot still,
> I knew nae higher praise.

He has said the same thing more than once in his letters, but for thoughts like these Burns's only natural expression is in verse.

The earlier Scottish poets, even down to Ramsay and Fergusson, had been essentially East-Country men; Burns, on the other hand, though sprung from an Eastern stock, is above all the poet of the West. This, natural enough from the place of his birth, was also the outcome of a deliberate resolve to glorify his native county. At a time when his best work yet remained to be done, in the autumn of 1785, he thus recorded his resolve in his Common-place Book,—an echo of stanzas written three months before in the *Epistle to William Simson*—

"However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Fergusson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, etc., immortalized in such celebrated performances, whilst my dear native country, the ancient bailieries of Carrick, Kyle and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants; a country where civil and particularly religious Liberty have ever found their first support and their last asylum; a country, the birthplace of many famous Philosophers, Soldiers and Statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish History, particularly a great many of the actions of the Glorious Wallace, the Saviour of his country; yet we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Aire, and the healthy mountainous source, and winding sweep of Doon emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, etc.

This is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education. Obscure I am, and obscure I must be, though no young poet nor young soldier's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine."

The composition of the above sentence may not be beyond criticism; the ambition that inspires it is unmistakable. By the time these words were written the poetical work of Burns had fairly begun; in fact some of his best-known poems were produced several months before. He had composed songs from his fifteenth year, and the gloom of Irvine had produced some religious pieces; but it was not till his twenty-sixth year that he finally set his hand in earnest to the task. Then all the latent powers develop in sudden and vigorous growth; poem after poem is produced with a rapidity that is only less surprising than the variety of his themes. With each fresh success the poet becomes more and more conscious of his own strength, until the final assurance is borne in upon him that the fame he longs for is already within his reach. To follow him step by step along this path is therefore the best way to appreciate his work, the growth of which is so closely connected in each case with what has gone before, and with the various changes in his life and fortunes.

It is as early as 1782, with *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*, that the real vein of Burns's poetry commences, inspired, as we know, by his falling in with the works of Fergusson; but the metre of the piece, though much used by the earlier poets, is not one of his most favourite measures. The poem itself is marked by the interest in animals that appears in some of his other poems, brightened by the humour arising from the fact that Mailie's death was only imaginary,

and from the "comical consternation" of the half-witted herd-boy who reported the accident that had befallen "the author's only pet yowe." The *Elegy* (which was practically re-written before being printed) is no doubt somewhat later, and most likely modelled on Fergusson's lament for Professor Gregory of St. Andrews, which, with its constant refrain, goes back again to that for Habbie Simson, the piper of Kilbarchan, the composition of Sempill of Beltrees. A few years later Burns eclipsed all these earlier essays in *Tam Samson's Elegy*.

The six-lined verse employed in the *Elegy* appears again in the lines sent to Rankine, and is the one most favoured by Burns for familiar correspondence in metre.* In this he was no doubt influenced by the exchange of poetical compliments between Allan Ramsay and Hamilton of Gilbertfield, the phrases and tags of which are often echoed in his verses. The imperfection of his models, in which only the most indulgent criticism can discern any traces of poetry or even of poetic expression, no doubt accounts for the many weak verses which Burns allowed to pass in this measure, but when at his best he uses it with a freedom and a strength unknown to the earlier versifiers. The theme of *The Epistle to Rankine*, which Burns printed in his first edition, is a humorous version of the incident leading to *The Poet's Welcome*, and Lockhart reprehends the "culpable levity with which he describes the nature of his offence." Here perhaps it is only fair to judge the poet's language by the standard of his own time, 1784.

* The stanza itself is found in Old English, and has been traced back to the poems of the Troubadours, but it is only in last century that it becomes so common in Scottish verse.

the standard too of "rough, rude, ready-witted" farmers. In the *Welcome*, moreover, the tone is serious enough, both in its defiance of the conventional morality and its feeling for the wronged ones; even the consolation that gossip means fame is not unreal, for a desire for fame was one of his ruling passions from his earliest years of reflection to the very close of his life.

In *Man was made to mourn*, his first English poem * of any note, Burns was under the spell of an old song, *The Life and Age of Man*, which his mother used to sing to her aged grand-uncle, who wept at its recital. In this there comes out strongly his sympathy with the poor against the rich, with the poor "o'er-labour'd wight" against the "haughty lordling," † and his bitter resentment of "man's inhumanity to man." There is not a little of his own experience of life in the poem, of the hardships at Mount Oliphant and the final struggles at Lochlea; in the mention of "follies and passions"; even the looking forward to death as "a blest relief" recalls his language of the Irvine period. The philosophy of the poem was one to which he was inclined even in later years. "Man is by no means a happy creature," he wrote in 1788.‡ "I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven, whose souls are tuned to gladness amid riches and honours, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many,

* Strictly speaking it is a song to the tune of *Piggy Bawn*, but Burns himself dropped the lyrical element when he came to print the piece.

† The original copy is more personal, speaking of "the lordly Cassilis' pride."

‡ Letter to Mrs. Dunlop, August 16, 1788. Compare the one of May 27 of the same year.

whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days are sold to the minions of fortune."

But Melancholy never quite marked Burns for her own. With *The Twa Herds, or the Holy Tulyie*, of the same year, begins a series of attacks against Calvinism, his hostility to which is already implied in the *Epistle to Rankine*. In this his powerful vein of satire, hitherto only displayed in epigrams, begins to assert itself, though as yet it has not gathered half its sting. It had ample opportunities for its display in the religious state of the west. The opposition between the old and the new parties in the Church, between the "New-Light" doctrines of the more reasonable Laodiceans, and the steadfast Calvinism of the "Whigs," was becoming most intense and bitter just at this time, and the sympathies of Burns were with the former. It is a curious result of the company in which he found himself in his ecclesiastical views, that he is in favour of the Lairds and Patronage, and satirizes the idea of giving "the brutes the power themsel's to choose their herds." The applause of Gavin Hamilton and others drew him away, no doubt unconsciously, from the democratic position of *Man is made to mourn*.

The Twa Herds.

His true sympathies, in other than Church matters, appear in their most pleasing form in the *Epistle to Davie*, "a brother poet," as he styles him, with that same generous admiration that made him overrate Ramsay and Fergusson. The main part of this he repeated to his brother Gilbert while at work in their "kail-yard" in the summer of 1784, but the epistle itself bears the date "January" (1785). Gilbert believed that it was his own favourable criticism of the poem that started in

Epistle to Davie.

his brother the idea of becoming an author,—which does not quite agree with Burns's own letter to Richard Brown. Certainly it was the best thing Burns had yet done; the ease and grace with which he moves through the difficult measure of *The Cherrie and the Slae* shows a complete mastery of technique, while the sequence of ideas in the poem is natural and easy. The keynote is found in that trait of his character recorded by Gilbert, that "he had always a particular jealousy of people who were richer than himself or who had more consequence in life," but in the poem this feeling is only transient. He is comforted by the thought of being able to work, and in the last resort *to beg*, an idea that recurs in the *Dedication to Gavin Hamilton* in the proud lines

> "For, Lord be thankit, I can plough;
> And when I downa yoke a naig,
> Then, Lord be thankit, I can beg." *

A beggar's life would at least give the enjoyment of Nature, painted in one beautiful verse; happiness is of the heart, not of worldly estate; this life has joys for all, the joys of friendship and of love,—of his Davie and his Jean. Later resentment did not make him excise her name here as he did in other poems; perhaps he found it too hard a thing to alter the lines in so finished a piece.

* Compare also his letter to John Murdoch of January 15, 1783. "Even the last shift of the unfortunate and the wretched does not much terrify me: I know that even then my talent for what the country folks call 'a sensible crack,' when it is once sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much esteem, that even then I would learn to be happy." "Better it is to die than to beg," says the Jewish writer, but the old Scottish beggar fared not so ill.

In *Holy Willie's Prayer*, composed early in 1785, the attack on religious hypocrisy is carried to its most daring issue. William Fisher, an elder in Mauchline Kirk, was a member of the Session which tried to debar Gavin Hamilton from the privileges of the Church, for habitual neglect of its ordinances, to say nothing of digging potatoes on Sunday. To modern feeling the action savours of intolerable persecution, but such was the fashion of the times. This, together with his general character, made him a fair target for Burns's keenest shafts. Attempts have since been made to prove that the elder was grossly maligned by Burns, and he may be as much entitled to a coat of whitewash as various other villains of history, but at this distance of time it is difficult to decide. In some respects the "Prayer" is Burns's most powerful production, from the strange way in which the very earnestness of the speaker appeals to the humorous sense of the reader, though its strong nature kept him from publishing it. Even reverend editors of his works have been fain to admire and commend it, arguing that it is merely hypocrisy and not religion that is scathed in its profanest lines. No doubt it is so, but it is the hypocrisy that dwells dangerously near to orthodoxy, and borrows its cloak on occasion; the doctrine of election is hardly misrepresented in the opening lines. How it might well be regarded by many honest minds is shown by the following criticism, quoted from the *Ayr Advertiser* of March 16, 1809:—

1785. **Holy Willie's Prayer.**

"The gross profanity with which a hypocrite is portrayed in this performance is not more offensive than the malevolent, derisive flippancy with which the most mysterious and awful points of the Christian

religion are treated. It is painful to think that in a part of Scotland, formerly so remarkable for tenacious adherence to religious truth, any man could suppose that the publication of such Socinian ribaldry, however wittily expressed, would meet with better reception than a direct avowal of Atheism."

Shortly before this was written, Holy Willie was found dead in a ditch, into which he had fallen while returning home from Mauchline. The Prayer was printed in his lifetime, but not by Burns nor his recognized executor; the poet only circulated it in manuscript.

Death and Dr. Hornbook.

A more harmless if not more humorous vein appears in *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, which was not given in the Kilmarnock edition, no doubt from some consideration for personal feelings, but was included in the first Edinburgh one. John Wilson, school-master at Tarbolton, and dabbler in medicine, had irritated Burns at a meeting of the Bachelors' Club, and this was the poet's revenge, the full effects of which he had not anticipated; it made the medical dominie leave the parish, though he later enjoyed a comfortable post in Glasgow, and survived the satirist by more than forty years. He even thought the poem "*rather* a compliment." Notwithstanding some of the coarser phrases used by Death, it is perhaps Burns's most successful satire for delicacy of point and humour. The picture of the half-drunk wayfarer and the grim skeleton who meets him—a combination apparently of Death and Time—is exquisitely drawn, as also the mournful resentment with which Death sees his business taken from him by "Jock Hornbook." * The conclusion also is as artistic as any-

* So named, of course, from the horn-book on which children learned their letters.

thing in Burns, although, on reflection, one cannot see why the clock striking any hour "ayont the twal" should have prevented Death from giving details of his plot against his rival.

With the first *Epistle to J. Lapraik* (April) begins a series of poetic epistles of a personal character, all written in the same six-lined stanza, which he had deserted in his *Epistle to Davie*. Lapraik, an elderly man, was a rhymer in his way, and one of his songs (founded, however, on some verses in the *Weekly Magazine*) had taken the fancy of Burns, who heard it sung at a social gathering, and immediately wrote to introduce himself to the "old Scotch bard." In this epistle he tells how he had been, from his earliest days, "a rhymer like by chance," and though scant of learning was not inclined to be beaten down by mere scholars, whom he attacks in often-quoted lines. "Ae spark o' Nature's fire" is all he asks, echoing lines he had read in *Tristram Shandy*. His unpopularity with some people, his fondness for female society, and his hatred to all selfish ends in life, are also spoken of in easy, natural verse. The prevailing tone of the *Second Epistle to Lapraik*, penned three weeks later, is much the same; the careless poets, outshone in this life by the money-makers—

Poetic Epistles.

> "Poor, thoughtless devils! yet may shine,
> In glorious light,
> While sordid sons o' Mammon's line
> Are dark as night."

By this time his poems (particularly *The Twa Herds*) were spreading in manuscript, and the *Epistle to William Simson* (May 1785) is in answer to a complimentary letter from the school-master of Ochiltree. The praise given him in this he thinks excessive; he has no in-

tention of rivalling either Hamilton, Ramsay, or Fergusson (for whose sake he rather unjustly curses the Edinburgh gentry), but for his dear-loved Ayrshire he will do his utmost, and strive to make her "streams and burnies shine up wi' the best." There is the ring of part of the *Epistle to Davie* about the verses which describe the "Poet's Progress," in tones widely different from the ambitious effort of his later life—

> "The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
> Till by himsel' he learned to wander,
> Adown some trottin' burn's meander,
> An' no think lang;
> O sweet to stray, an' pensive ponder
> A heartfelt sang."

The postscript to the epistle gives a humorous, if not very pointed, account of the meaning of "New-Light." The ecclesiastical question is also the inspiration of the *Epistle to John Goldie*, an elderly Kilmarnock wine-merchant and theologian, whose published views on the latter subject were of a kind to endear him to Burns; but the merit of the piece, as well as that of the *Third Epistle to Lapraik*, written during harvest, is well indicated by the fact that Burns never published either of them. Nor did he dignify with print the *Epistle to the Rev. John McMath*, who had asked for a copy of *Holy Willie's Prayer*, although it is much superior to the previous two, and puts his attitude toward the professors of religion in the clearest light.

> "Their sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces,
> Their three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces,
> Their raxin' conscience,"

together with their treatment of Gavin Hamilton, are the reasons for his dislike to them, while his defence

of his attack upon the self-righteous is the same as that of his reverend apologists—

"All hail, Religion! maid divine!
Pardon a Muse sae mean as mine,
Who, in her rough, imperfect line,
Thus daurs to name thee,
To stigmatize false friends of thine
Can ne'er defame thee."

The *Second Epistle to Davie*, which he left to that poet to print, closes for a time this correspondence in verse. The carelessness of the race of poets is its main theme, illustrated by his own example,

"Whiles dazed wi' love, whiles dazed wi' drink
Wi' jads or masons;
An' whiles, but aye owre late, I think
Braw sober lessons."

By this time Burns had begun the composition of those poems descriptive of Scottish life, which are his most finished and most universally admired productions. The earliest of these was *The Holy Fair*, a description of the large and miscellaneous gatherings which took place at Scottish parish churches on sacramental occasions,* and in which the poet's eye could find material enough for satire or for humour, without venturing too near sacred things. Lockhart, however, seems fully more shocked at the possibility of irreverence in *The Holy Fair* than at its actual presence in *Holy Willie's Prayer*. That such scenes were full of abuses is an undoubted fact, nowhere more vividly described in prose than in the "Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders

The Holy Fair.

* The name "Fair" was regularly applied to these meetings, and is not Burns's invention. In one of his letters the poet speaks of "a Mauchline sacrament, a senseless rabble."

in the Church of Scotland," published in the year of the poet's birth, part of which he has simply versified.* The general plan of the poem, as well as the verse employed,† is directly suggested by Fergusson's *Leith Races*, where the poet is invited to join in the sport by Mirth, as Burns by Fun. As usual Burns has entirely eclipsed his model, although it is one of Fergusson's best pieces. The introductory quotation from *Hypocrisy à la Mode* is no doubt the poet's own invention, like others of his mottoes. In common with most of his poems, of which early copies have been preserved, *The Holy Fair* was carefully polished before being printed, and the alterations, even when very slight, contribute much to the excellent finish of the piece.‡ *The Ordination*, of somewhat later date (January 1786), is a companion picture, more local and less interesting as a whole, but with some powerful touches, which were

* An extract of some length is given by Chambers, in which one finds the original of the lines,

"Here some are thinkin' on their sins,
An' some upon their claes;
Ane curses feet that fyles his shins,
Anither sighs an' prays."

The words of the pamphlet are—"One seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is scolding and cursing his neighbour for squeezing or treading on him; in an instant after, his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing, and weeping for his sins."

† The stanza, slightly modified, goes back to the sixteenth-century models of *Christ's Kirk on the Green* and *Peblis to the Play*.

‡ As, for instance, in the seventh verse from the end, where for the line "His piercin' words, like *Highlan'* swords,' the MS. has the much weaker adjective, "*twae-edged*." In the twelfth verse, *damnation* instead of the earlier *salvation* was suggested by Dr. Blair, but it does not fit the context so well.

also the result of careful revision, as an early copy proves.* The poem itself is a satirical exultation on a temporary triumph of the "Auld Licht" party, and pretends to rejoice at the discomfiture of "Common-sense" and "Cauld Morality" by evangelical orthodoxy. No doubt the vigour of its satire did much to console the friends of the New Light for the repulse sustained.

Also in the same form of verse is *Hallowe'en* (November 1785), an excellent piece of rustic folk-lore, in which Burns has sketched, both in verse and prose, the various practices by which the country lads and lasses sought to pry into their matrimonial future,—practices still to some extent observed, though perhaps less seriously now than then. The scene in which the poem is laid is that of his early years at Alloway and Mount Oliphant; by this time he had grown out of the mental attitude in which such observances could have even a show of seriousness. No doubt his old teacher in folk-lore, Betty Davidson, was a great authority on such "freits," which found poetic expression about the same time in Ireland in the *Midnight Court* of Brian Merriman. It is the humorous side of these practices, and the baseless alarms to which those who essayed them were liable, that Burns aims at bringing out in his verses; the serious side of the observances is given in his notes. The theme itself, as well as its treatment, was not original; he must

Halloween.

* Thus the two lines in the fifth verse,

"That stipend is a carnal weed
He takes but for the fashion;"

are substituted for two very colourless ones—

"And lay your hands upon his head,
And seal his high commission."

have seen and imitated a poem of twelve stanzas in his favourite six-line metre, by one John Mayne, which appeared in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine* for November 1780. Several of Burns's verses are directly suggested by the stanzas of the obscure poet,* but this in no way detracts from the actual merits of the poem, in which, besides the humorous recital of the accidents that befall the actors, there are glimpses of natural scenery and of the tender passion that throw a witching light over the whole. No man ever dealt with popular superstition more tenderly or more gracefully than Burns.

To a Mouse was a product of the same November, and is one of those poems which evince the sympathy of Burns for the animal creation, oppressed by "man's dominion," a feeling which appears in several compositions of this period,† as later in the lines on the wounded hare. The general conception of the poem is perhaps more striking than its actual expression, the second verse being particularly weak, but two lines have become classical—

> "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
> Gang aft agley,"—

"and in the conclusion," says Currie, "there is a deep melancholy, a sentiment of doubt and dread that rises to the sublime."

The Jolly Beggars.

There is neither melancholy, doubt, nor dread in the cantata of *The Jolly Beggars*, in which the poet's sympathetic hand has portrayed with keen appreciation the life of those homeless wanderers, with whom he thought it possible he might

* Some of these are quoted by Chambers.

† Such as the *Song composed in August* ("Now westlin' winds and slaught'ring guns," etc.), and the opening lines of *The Brigs of Ayr*.

one day associate. No doubt this anticipation, serious enough at times, is accountable for the glamour with which the poet's eye has succeeded in investing the uninviting group of sorners and sturdy beggars, assembled for the evening in the Mauchline alehouse. To some indeed, such as the ballad-singer, he has given characters and sentiments that are an echo of his own, and it is this fellow-feeling that raises the "ragged ring" out of its sordid surroundings, and exalts their careless independence of the world, their outspokenness of tongue, and their frank love-making, into an imaginary region that is apt to make the reader forget the dubious nature of his company. The plan of the poem is one that Burns never again attempted. Indeed it is strange that the cantata, which to Lockhart's mind entitled Burns to rank with Shakespeare in the power of making imagination predominate over the outward shows of things, and which Carlyle considered "the most strictly poetical of all his poems," was entirely neglected by its author, who parted with the manuscript almost as soon as it was written, and kept no copy of it. In 1793 he only remembered a few lines of the closing song. It may be that family criticism had influence with him here. In one or two places the Muse is certainly too rude in speech for polite and decent society, but considering his subject, we may well be pleased that Burns succeeded in keeping her so much in order. As a point of technique, and one quite true to life, it may be noticed that the songs of the beggars are much less Scottish than the recitative parts, some of them in fact being English throughout, while others have the merest sprinkling of Scottish words. This may also be due in part to his model, for even *The Jolly Beggars* had one, a song entitled *The*

Merry Beggars, printed before Burns was born, with its chorus of

> "Whoe'er would be merry and free,
> Let him list, and from us he may learn,
> In palaces who shall you see
> Half so happy as we in a barn."

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

It was immediately after describing this scene of lawless life and love that Burns painted another, for which his strangely compound nature had no less sympathy, and which was calculated to inspire all that was best in him,—the life in one of those humble cottages, his pleasure in which, as he told Dugald Stewart, "none could understand, who had not witnessed like himself the happiness and the worth which they contained." Burns had always in him a strong vein of religious fervour, more the result of feeling than of reason, but hallowed to him by recollections of early days, and by a reverence for what was noblest in the observances of family life. He frequently remarked to his brother Gilbert, "that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, 'let us worship God,' used by a decent sober head of a family introducing family worship." From this idea, of which his own father supplied a noble example, sprang *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, a poem which, beginning with a scene of common life and labour like that depicted in its model, the *Farmer's Ingle* of Fergusson, rises to heights untouched by the earlier poet. Even the unfamiliar Spenserian stanza is no trammel to him in the finest passages, and probably suits his lofty theme better than any of his more usual and lighter measures would have done.*

* He had only used it in three stanzas of the Irvine period, and never came back to it. Its use here was suggested by the similar

The first verse, containing the dedication to Aiken, is no doubt an after-thought; the poem naturally begins with "November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh," recalling the first line of *Man was made to mourn*, while the remainder of the verse is an echo of Fergusson's opening one, "When gloamin' grey atoure the welkin keeks." Then comes the picture of the cotter's humble home, cheered by the presence of wife and children, and brightened by the dawnings of innocent love, a home which, by a solemn transformation, rises above all material cares, and expands into a temple of holiness, more sacred to the poet than a cathedral's pomp, and awaking in him a patriotic pride in his country and his people, a deep, heartfelt conviction that

> "From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
> That makes her loved at home, revered abroad."

In this conviction Burns has sounded the hearts of his countrymen, who have taken the poem to themselves as the highest expression of the religious side of Scottish life, as a psalm of family affection and family devotion. Despite some false notes in its general harmony, such as the attack on Italian music, and the invidious comparison between the honest cotter and the wicked lordling, there is no other of his poems which appeals more universally and more deeply to the national conscience than this. Its world, according to Matthew Arnold, is not a beautiful one, but it is real, it is Scottish, and it is sincere; it is the highest point in the feeling, if not in the art, of Burns.

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stanza of the *Farmer's Ingle*, which only differs in the arrangement of the rhymes. It need scarcely be pointed out, that in more than half of the verses Burns is writing in English, which was always the natural expression of his more serious moods. Only in the earlier parts (stanzas 2—7, 9 and 10) is the poem Scottish at all.

Address to the Deil.

His verse returns to its more usual paths in the poems that follow on this. In the *Address to the Deil* it is the devil of folk-lore rather than of religion that the poet accosts with familiarity, even with levity, and the "priest-like father" of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* gives way to the superstitious grandmother of the *Farmer's Ingle*,—Betty Davidson is no doubt again in evidence. The humour of "The deil, or else an outler quey," in *Halloween* is here elaborated in various pictures of night-scares easily explained, but which, as well as charms on man and beast, and the wiles of kelpies and spunkies, are all laid on the shoulders of Auld Nick. The poet's parting expression of sympathy with the devil has often been noticed,—"without knowing, I am sure," says Carlyle, "that Uncle Toby had been beforehand there with him." It is more likely that Burns did know it (he had read *Tristram Shandy* while living at Lochlea), and that he borrowed the idea from the passage in question.*

Scotch Drink.

In the *Epistle to Goldie* and *The Holy Fair* Burns had incidentally sung the praises of liquor as an inspirer of genius. He now took up the theme by itself in *Scotch Drink*, and, catching perhaps the suggestion from Fergusson's *Caller Water*, sings its praises both for its own merits and as compared with foreign rivals. The same subject inspires *The Author's earnest Cry and Prayer*, calling upon the Scottish members of Parliament to relieve the distilleries of their country from some of the rigour of the excise. There is much humour in the picture of "Scotland an' me," and the probable consequences of the present

* A similar idea occurs in the lines *On a Scotch bard, etc.*

"He wadna wrang'd the vera deil,
That's ower the sea."

state of things, while the praises of whisky in the postscript are a delight to the admirers of the national Bacchus, encouraging each other with "Freedom and whisky gang thegither." According to Gilbert Burns, much of this praise was more poetic than serious, his brother not being much in the way of drinking at that time.

1786.

The poet's kindly feeling for animals appears again in *The Auld Farmer's Salutation to his Mare*, where the human interest closely mingles with the other, as it also does in *The Twa Dogs*, written to commemorate his favourite dog Luath, wantonly killed by some one on the night before his father's death. The poem, however, was not written till the beginning of 1786, and the original intention of doing something "for the memory of his quadruped friend" is overlaid by a deeper design, that of contrasting the life of peasant and peer on the lines indicated in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*. The dogs are perhaps as natural animals as ever took their part in the dialogue of a fable, rivalling the "uplands mouse and burgess mouse" of old Henryson, and are evidence of the same dramatic power that marks *The Jolly Beggars*. Cæsar, however, rather deserts his original position, and joins with Luath in commending the cotter against the laird. It was very natural that Burns should be a partial judge, and contrast the virtues of the one class with the vices of the other,—he knew the inner life of the former, he had only seen the outward vanities of the latter. No doubt "Master Cæsar's" disclosures were more applicable then than now, but Burns's later experience of the nobility of his country must have gone far to make him doubt whether all his strictures were universally

The Twa Dogs.

just. The poem, however, will always be a favourite, just by reason of its point of view, and the masterly drawing of the two dogs.

By this time Burns had convinced himself that he was indeed a poet, and was seriously making up his mind to come before the world as an author. The first hint of this is given in the *Epistle to James Smith*, a "wag" in Mauchline, and a bosom friend. As yet the consciousness of merit was not secure; some lingering doubts still held him back, some disquieting fears that the fame he longed for was unattainable for one in his humble estate. What need to struggle then? Let pleasure be the guiding star; enjoyment of youth was all that remained for one doomed to obscure old age, when love and social pleasures could no more be enjoyed.

Epistle to Smith.

> "But truce with peevish, poor complaining!
> Is Fortune's fickle Luna waning?
> E'en let her gang!
> Beneath what licht she has remaining
> Let's sing our sang!"

These lingering doubts were but the darkness before the dawn. In *The Vision* the hope has become a firm conviction, and the poet formally invests himself with the laureateship of his own Coila. The seriousness of the poem is shown by its English cast,* only the first eight verses being in his native dialect, but these contain the most powerful picture that could be given of his position at this time.

The Vision.

* The effect of the English stanzas is further increased by discarding the feminine rhymes so constant in the Scottish ones. In Duan Second there is only one instance, *driven—Heaven*, and even these words are practically monosyllables.

"All in this mottie, misty clime,
I backward mused on wasted time,
How I had spent my youthfu' prime,
An' done nae-thing,
But stringin' blethers up in rhyme
For fools to sing.

Had I to guid advice but harkit,
I micht, by this, hae led a market,
Or strutted in a bank an' clarkit
My cash-account:
While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit,
Is a' th' amount."

He is about to renounce rhyme for ever, when the female genius of the district comes to stop his reckless vows.* Her appearance is made the occasion for a panegyric on Ayrshire, and its noble families ancient and modern, overdrawn in the original scheme, but carefully cut down before being published. † In the second part the periods of his own poetic development are finely traced from his early

"Uncouth rhymes,
Fired at the simple, artless lays
Of other times,—"

* So far it looks as if Burns had been following a poem by Wollaston (1681), to whom, as he sits in deep melancholy, the Muse appears, bare-kneed like Coila, and reproaches his unfaithful resolve to give up poetry—

"What indigested thought, or rash advice,
Has caused thee to apostatize?
Not my ill usage, surely, made thee fly
From thy apprenticeship in poetry."

† In the Kilmarnock edition the account of Coila's robe only occupies four stanzas; another seven were added in the Edinburgh edition, but the Stair MS. shows yet another twelve. The insertion of these seven was apparently made to please Mrs. Dunlop, otherwise the omissions show how correct Burns's taste was at this time; in his later work his judgment was less unerring.

up through the inspiration of rural sights and sounds to deeper meditation on men and Nature, seen indeed by the meteor-light of passion—

> "But yet the light that led astray,
> Was light from Heaven."

For one who had the humility to rank himself beneath Thomson, Shenstone, and Gray, there is a boldness of conception in this vision of fame that contradicts his own self-depreciation. Before a year had passed, the poet knew that his visitor was no mere local divinity, but the "Poetic Genius of his Country."

His Muse was justified in her work: it remained for him to vindicate his life. In the *Epistle to Smith* and *The Vision* Burns had contrasted his own wayward self with the "douce folk that live by rule"; in the *Address to the Unco Guid* he defends his case against them, repeating the thoughts, and almost the very words, that he had written down in his Common-place Book two years before.* An accidental power of controlling the passions, absence of temptation, opportunities of concealment, these are in his eyes the frequent causes of a reputation for virtue and godliness. There is no doubt much special pleading here, but the position has also its real basis, and the closing verses are the plea often advanced for the poet's own failings. Burns knew himself as well as any one, and valued the knowledge. "It was ever my opinion that the great unhappy mistakes and blunders,

To the Unco Guid.

* March 1784. Compare, for instance, the words, "Any man who can thus think will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him with a brother's eye," with the lines—

> "Then gently scan your brother man," etc.

both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance or mistaken notions of themselves." It is this idea, expressed in often-quoted lines, that relieves the poem *To a Louse.*

In the lines *To a Mountain Daisy*, the immortal flower turned down by his plough in April of this year, there are presages of impending trouble, "the native querulous feelings of a heart which 'melancholy has marked for her own,'" caused no doubt by the unfortunate issue of his love for Jean Armour, as the reference to "the fate of artless maid" may indicate. It was after the first grief for this had subsided that his wounded feelings found relief in *The Lament*, "occasioned by the unfortunate issue of a friend's amour"—a thin disguise adopted for publication. "Misery is like love," he elsewhere says; "to speak its language truly, one must have felt it." Nowhere has Burns wedded misery to deeper music than in this poem, which, strangely enough, finds its closest parallel in after years in the celebration of a rival love, in *To Mary in Heaven.* The two stanzas *To Ruin* and the poem *Despondency* belong to the same themes, and are even more full of despair, not of love only, but of life itself, and look forward to death as the only relief. Already, at the age of twenty-seven, he speaks of his "enviable early days," and admonishes, with all the authority of a weight of years, the "tiny elves" that are looking forward to manhood.

The Lament.

This was a phase of thought that could not be permanent with Burns, and in the *Epistle to a young Friend*, written in the following month, there is more of worldly wisdom than of morbid reflection. The sententiousness of the epistle is remarkable; there is a point and con-

ciseness in the various maxims that is often the result of his own experience, while the nature of some sets the poem beside the *Address to the Unco Guid* as an explanation and apology for his own life.

In *A Dream* the old sprightliness has returned, and in the verse of the *Holy Fair* and *Halloween*, with a more exacting rhyme, the rural poet tenders good advice to his sovereign, in an off-hand style which shocked some loyal and unimaginative people. Burns, however, was at the time under no obligations to His Majesty,—"for neither pension, post, nor place am I your humble debtor,"—and had no mind to flatter at the expense of facts, though it is a sense of humour, and no mere devotion to truth, that is the main-spring of the poem.

The *Dedication to Gavin Hamilton*, no doubt meant to open the Kilmarnock edition, although the place of honour was given to *The Twa Dogs*, is one of Burns's happiest compositions, in its entire want of conventionality. The account of both poet and patron is unique among dedications, and the trick caught in *Holy Willie's Prayer* of commending the latter by making the "unco guid" denounce him, is here carried to an artistic finish. The good wishes for his patron's welfare are in his happiest style, while probably to none but Burns would it have occurred to end in such a way—

> "If, in the vale of humble life,
> The victim sad of Fortune's strife,
> I, thro' the tender-gushing tear,
> Should recognize my master dear,
> If friendless, low, we meet together,
> Then, sir, your hand—my friend and brother."

Burns had now recorded in imperishable verse not

only all that was highest in the life of his people, but all that was good and bad in himself—his own virtues and vices, his loves and hatreds, his griefs and joys. To his own mind his career in Scotland was now ended, and the two poems *On a Scotch Bard* and *A Bard's Epitaph* are its final summing up, done with an honesty of confession "so solemn and so touching as to take the sting from every other comment on the subject." It need not at all surprise us that the solemnity was not very lasting, as *Nature's Law* and the *Reply to a Tailor* will bear witness, the birth of Jean Armour's children being apparently responsible for this sudden ebullition of spirits. The two poems above-mentioned do, however, bring to a natural end the first period of his verse, as they are the latest pieces included in the Kilmarnock volume; his next published poem, *The Brigs of Ayr*, may most fitly be taken as the transition to a new style, which, while it added some pieces that could ill be spared, is but poor in the results of its ten years compared with the wonderful work of these eighteen months bygone.

CHAPTER V.

POEMS (*continued*).

THE *Brigs of Ayr*, one of Burns's longest poems, is perhaps the best evidence that his genius was not fitted for sustained composition. Excellent as it is in its parts, there is a want of unity in the design, and a lack of point in the conclusion, that give one a right to doubt whether Burns, with the best of leisure, could ever have completed any of the longer works he afterwards planned and left unexecuted. The general design of the poem is no doubt suggested by Fergusson's *Plainstanes and Causeway*, which at dead of night hold solemn converse with each other in the Edinburgh street, though Burns has improved on his model by imparting greater personality and power to the figures of his vision. The dedication to John Ballantine, like that of the *Cotter's Saturday Night* to Aiken, is most likely an afterthought, intended to show his gratitude to the worthy banker, who had befriended his interests with an "honest, warm, and tender delicacy." The real theme of the poem is the dialogue between the spirits of the Auld and New Brigs, in which humour, satire, and even prophecy are deftly mingled, suddenly broken off by the appearance of a fairy train, which comes in as a sort of *Deus ex machina* to stop the wordy conflict, and give the poet an opportunity of scattering some compliments to his

1786. **Brigs of Ayr.**

patrons. We are left with the impression that the poet became tired of his subject at this point and suddenly broke off, but in fact the whole of the concluding passage is a purple patch entirely different in language and in tone from what has gone before. Probably the *Brigs* is an instance of his common practice of composing the middle of a poem first, and then adding the introduction and conclusion. The metre, too, is a new one for him, too slow in its movement for his best effects, and too long in line for his usual conciseness of phrase; but it is one that he is given to using in his later work, and its employment here, as well as the general style of the poem, may indicate that Burns was beginning to aim at different literary effects from those in which he had hitherto shown his strength.

For the time, however, he fell back on his older verse in the *Address to the Toothache*, the *Lines on meeting with Lord Daer*, and *Tam Samson's Elegy*, the latter composed after the models that had already served him for the elegy on Mailie; one of its best verses ("There low he lies in lasting rest," etc.) is a later addition. The *Epistle to Major Logan* is only an echo of earlier work, even to repeating a verse from the *Second Epistle to Davie*—a confession of light-hearted folly, and a joyous resolve to persevere in it. The *Address to a Haggis*, to judge by its style, belongs rather to this set of effusions than to the Edinburgh period in which it first appears, and to which it is commonly assigned.*

His old forms, however, did not satisfy him, and in *A Winter Night* he makes "his first attempt in that irregular kind of measure in which many of our finest

* If the verses *On Pastoral Poetry* are really the work of Burns (which may reasonably be doubted) they might come in here, rather than in 1791, to which Scott Douglas has assigned them.

odes are written." It was not his good fortune to add to their number. The poem opens with six verses in the old measure, of which only the first four are really Scottish, and worthy of his best inspiration, especially in his sympathy with "the ourie cattle or silly sheep" exposed to all the fury of the storm. The ode proper is a paraphrase of Shakespeare's "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," with touches from *King Lear*, and its piled-up phrases are much less effective than the simple language of his model. In the closing stanza Burns is himself again, but the whole "ode" has a very patch-work effect.

The *Address to Edinburgh*, which finally marks the new phase in the poet's life, suggests an interesting comparison with that of a Highland contemporary of Burns—Duncan Ban McIntyre, the forester of Glen-orchy. The poem has been reckoned among his "tamest verses," and Lockhart only admits it to be "remarkable for the grand stanzas on the Castle and Holyrood, with which it concludes." In the last lines of these there appears the first trace of the poet's Jacob-
1787. itism. Before six months had passed this had become a settled principle with him, combined with a conviction that it had been the side taken by his ancestors. He then assures Mr. Tytler of the fact;—

> "My fathers that name have rever'd on a throne,
> My fathers have died to right it;
> Those fathers would spurn their degenerate son,
> That name should he scoffingly slight it." *

* In the end of 1789, Burns writes as follows to Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable:—"Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest, though they left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoted crowd that followed their leaders, yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost: with unshaken firm-

In the same *Address to Wm. Tytler*, Burns, according to Professor Nichol, "perpetrated his worst lines"—

> "Though something like moisture conglobes in my eye,
> Let no one misdeem me disloyal,"—

as he had given "his worst criticism" in the previous month in the Prologue for Mr. Woods—

> "Here Douglas forms wild Shakespeare into plan."

In his best Edinburgh composition, the *Epistle to Mrs. Scott*, of March 1787, he falls back on the stanza of his *Epistle to Davie*, and nowhere has he expressed more beautifully his youthful longing to do something for his country, and the first inspiration that sprang from his sweetheart of the harvest-field, afterwards detailed in prose in the letter to Dr. Moore. In the *Burlesque Lament for Creech* Burns has lost the old vigour of his favourite metre, and the only verse that reflects the Border tour he was then pursuing is a later addition to the poem.

The poet had now completed his first winter in Edinburgh, where he had been in a new world. "I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to catch the manners living as they rise." This observation of mankind he always considered to be one of his strongest points. "I seem to be one sent into the world to see and observe," he had written in the beginning of 1783; "the joy of my heart is to study men, their manners and their ways."

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ness and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and their country." He encloses to her this poem, adding, "Poets are not very famous for their prudence; but as I can do nothing for a cause which is now nearly no more, I do not wish to hurt myself."

But in Edinburgh he was observing from the outside a life that was not his own by birth or breeding, one to which he could never become totally assimilated, and for this lack of intimacy no penetration of judgment could compensate. Satire and sympathy alike were deprived of that sureness of aim and closeness of touch which they had possessed when directed amid his native surroundings. Much of this was known to Burns himself, but he felt constrained to go forward; he might succeed in new fields of poetry, but he could hardly return to the old ones.

The *Elegy on the Death of John McLeod*, or on that of Sir James Hunter Blair, are, as Burns himself says of the latter, "but mediocre"; and the only real poem of the latter part of 1787 is the *Humble Petition of Bruar Water*, though even here it is only in the second half of it that he approaches his earlier level. He could not, however, be at his best as a mere landscape artist; it is only (with rare exceptions) such scenes as are hallowed to him by some striking memory that he can make to live in his lines, and Bruar was only the object of a passing gaze. His native scenery also affects him even here; the wooded river-banks, the "smoky, dewy lawn" of Ayr, are the scenes he tries to depict among the bare hills of the North.

In the *Birthday Ode* for Prince Charles Edward (December 1787) the sentiment of the lines on the Stirling window is maintained, and his language is strong for the Stuarts against the House of Brunswick. The ode is one of those compositions which justify Jeffrey's severe strictures on Burns's "false and crude notion of what constitutes strength in writing," leading him to employ "a mere accumulation of hyperbolical expressions, which encumber the diction instead of exalting

it, and show the determination to be impressive, without the power of executing it." The criticism applies in an equal, or even greater degree, to the elegy on the death of Robert Dundas, which even the poet himself did not rank above "tolerable." The wound to his pride, however, when the son of the deceased took no notice of the poem or the accompanying letter, is bitterly referred to more than once in his later writings.

The return to country life at Ellisland did not restore Burns to himself, or save him from his friends, in the matter of his poems. The *Verses in Friar's Carse Hermitage*, written soon after his arrival there, and revised almost to re-writing, are in a simple strain, but lacking in strength and point, while the *Fête Champêtre* is too much of a society function for the poet of Halloween and the Holy Fair. 1788.

The *Epistle to Robert Graham* is written "not in imitation, but in the manner, of Pope's Moral Epistles," and was a "walk of poesy" entirely new to him. The attempt is not a successful one. In his own sphere Burns had a vigour of thought and expression that easily raised him above the models he found in Ramsay and Fergusson; for purely English work he was not so qualified, and could create nothing new in that direction. The advice of others no doubt encouraged him to this new departure, although he fortunately had not listened to their attempts to improve his earlier work, and had no great opinion of his critics as a whole. "Sir," he said to Ramsay of Auchtertyre, "these gentlemen remind me of some spinsters in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is fit for neither weft nor woof." In the matter of his future work he was either more under their sway, or their advice fitted in with his own Epistle to Graham.

inclinations. They had persuaded him, or he had persuaded himself, that what he had already done was merely an indication of what he yet might do. Dr. Blair had advised him to "cultivate his genius";—"Take time and leisure to improve and mature your talents, for, on any second production you give the world, your fate, as a poet, will very much depend." Dr. Moore had given similar advice, perhaps even more fatal because more explicit. "It is evident that you already possess a great variety of expression and command of the English language, you ought, therefore, to deal more sparingly for the future in the provincial dialect. . . . In my opinion you should plan some larger work than any you have as yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan in your mind, without beginning to execute any part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little more of history," * and so on. Burns agreed with the views of both of these learned doctors, and the echoes of their advice are the keynote of a letter, which accompanied a copy of the *Epistle to Graham* sent to Dr. Moore (January 4, 1789). "The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late *éclat* was owing to the singularity of my situation and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I have said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude to learn the Muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him 'who forms the secret bias of the soul'; but I as firmly believe that *excellence* in the profession is the

* Letter of May 23, 1787.

fruit of industry, labour and pains *—at least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the Press I put off to a very distant day—a day that may never arrive; but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one."

The *Epistle to Graham* is his first attempt to carry out this design, "just to try the strength of my Muse's pinion in that way." Apart from its poetical defects, there is a tone of dependence in it which is in striking contrast with his earlier epistles to his rustic compeers; nor is it any longer a case of "sic poet and sic patron." Even if "Lord be thankit, I can plough," is still a consolation, yet the whole account of Nature's child, the poet, is one which shows how much his recent experience had told on the author's views of life.

> "A being formed to amuse his graver friends,
> Admired and praised, and there the homage ends;
> A mortal quite unfit for Fortune's strife,
> Yet oft the sport of all the ills of life;
> Prone to enjoy each pleasure riches give,
> Yet haply wanting wherewithal to live;
> Longing to wipe each tear, to heal each groan,
> Yet frequent all unheeded in his own."

He soon planned a larger work in this new style, to be entitled *The Poet's Progress*. "I propose," he writes, "it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years," and

The Poet's Progress.

* Compare the letter (to Henry Erskine ?) of January 22, 1789—"The rough material of fine writing is certainly the gift of genius; but I as firmly believe that the workmanship is the united effort of Pains, Attention, and repeated Trial."

immediately begins to send the various fragments to his friends, just as each one is written. The great poem never reached its hundredth line ; a complaint of the defenceless condition of the poet, sketches of Creech and Smellie, and mock heroics on Dulness,—these are all the sections ever written of *The Poet's Progress.* The design was no doubt quite given up by the October of 1791, when the greater portion of it was economically converted into *The Second Epistle to Graham.*

Also strongly in the style of Pope is the fragment entitled *Sappho Rediviva,* concerning which there has been some confusion, caused by Burns quoting part of it in his last letter to Clarinda. The lines refer to a notorious Court of Session case in 1787, in which Burns sympathized deeply with the lady. In all probability he took up the theme only because it seemed a suitable one for a fresh attempt in his new manner. The *Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Oswald,* apart from its demerits as poetry, is an unchivalrous, even venomous, attack on a dead woman, whose funeral pageant had caused him some annoyance. Even the fact that "among her servants and tenants she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality" is no justification for this abuse of the Muse's gifts. Another ode, *On the Departed Regency Bill,* exhibits the same error of mistaking vehemence for power, and is a rather pointless performance. National politics were seldom a congenial sphere for Burns, and his "poetic whim" of contrasting Fox and Pitt as rival statesmen did not get beyond the merest sketch.

1789.

The Wounded Hare is interesting not only in itself, as an instance of the poet's kindly feeling for all helpless things, but also because of the criticisms with which Dr. Gregory assailed it, which show clearly how much

Burns had put himself in the hands of the trained judges of correctness in verse. The poet whose work had been a revelation to his countrymen is calmly told that his lines "well deserve that you should revise them carefully, and polish them to the utmost," while his critic refers him to two "pieces of Mrs. Hunter's poetry," in order that he may mark and learn "how much correctness and high polish enhance the value of such compositions." The stanza is bad, the language coarse and vulgar, the epithets ridiculous, the grammar faulty, the sense vague—Dr. Gregory could hardly have treated the veriest tyro in verse-making more severely. If Burns was ever to surpass his earlier work it could hardly be in forms like this, in which "some more of Mrs. Hunter's poems" are graciously promised him for his better instruction.

It may have been a consciousness of this, a feeling that the laurels of these poetic fields were not for him, that brought him back to his own native ground in the lines on Captain Grose, the fat and merry antiquary, whom he had met at Friar's Carse. The first verse is perhaps best known (though "Land o' Cakes" is not Burns's own phrase but Fergusson's), but the account of the Captain's collection of antiquities is amusing enough, and the piece as a whole is equal to many of his earlier humorous poems. There is also something of the old ringing assaults on Calvinism in *The Kirk of Scotland's Alarm*, occasioned by the heresy hunt against Dr. McGill of Ayr, which had been impending for some time. The form is rather artificial, and the satire, pointed as it is in some cases, is too local and personal to appeal to the reader in the same way as *Holy Willie's Prayer*. The poet's own remarks on its merits, in the letters sent along with copies of it,

are extremely just. "The enclosed ballad," he wrote to Graham of Fintry, "is, I confess, too local, but I laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too." That he did not print it, however, was perhaps more owing to its dangerous character than to its poetic defects.

The *Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*, the first of its kind for many a day, is not always happy in its phrasing; there is rather a want of fitness in giving the name of "my gude auld cockie" to one whom Dr. Johnson had looked on with reverence, and whom Heron called an "angel upon earth." It supplies, however, the most touching defence of his action in turning excise-man, and contains stanzas which would not surprise us in the epistles of the old Mauchline days. The one beginning, "Come, Firm Resolve, take thou the van," is evidently based on a favourite quotation from Young often met with in his letters of this period—

> "On Reason build Resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man."

To these poems of 1789 may be added the ballads of *The Whistle* and *The Five Carlins*, the former dealing with the great drinking-match at Carse, and the latter with a Parliamentary election. Both of these have a good deal of vigour in them, with lines here and there that bear the stamp of Burns, but beyond this their poetic value is very slight. The *Prologue* written for Sutherland to deliver on the first night of the following year is in no way remarkable, and the later *Scots Prologue* is strangely misnamed, but may give the hint that the poet was now thinking of writing a Scottish drama,—an intention known from

1790.

other sources. The *Election Ballad*, written at the close of the contest, shares the common fate of losing most of its interest when the events celebrated in it are no longer burning questions; but the opening is good, and the exaggerated rage and confusion of the strife between the two parties contrasts gracefully with the poet's quiet position as a spectator—

> "So when the storm the forest rends,
> The robin in the hedge descends,
> And sober chirps securely."

The mention of "gallant Graham" making "auld Covenanters shiver" recalls the lines in the *Birthday Ode*,—"great Dundee who smiling Victory led, and fell a Martyr in her arms,"—and reminds one that Burns, though he had boasted of his native district being the asylum of religious liberty, only once displays any sympathy for the heroes of the Covenant, his Jacobite tendencies inclining him to venerate all supporters of the Divine right of the Stuarts.

The *Elegy on Matthew Henderson* is of a higher order of things, and it is fortunate that Burns thus completed the fragment he had laid aside. "It is," he wrote, "a tribute to the memory of a man I much loved," although no mention of him can be found in any of his writings to explain the reason for the attachment. Henderson was an Edinburgh acquaintance, and apparently a "good fellow," but we might have expected that one who inspired such a poem would have entered more deeply into the course of the poet's life. The whole of Nature is called upon to mourn for him as "the ae best fellow e'er was born," and in no other poem has Burns brought together in more graceful and tender verses all the sights and sounds he loved so

well. The Epitaph, too, is full of a large humanity that makes it almost as appropriate for the poet himself as for its proper subject.

Tam o' Shanter.

In *Tam o' Shanter* Burns entered into a new vein, and one which it is a pity he did not pursue, but the poem was only written to fulfil a promise to Captain Grose, who had consented to include Alloway Kirk in his volume, provided the poet would furnish a witch story to accompany it. The tradition which forms the basis of the tale is given by Burns in a letter to Grose, and this piece of plain narrative is the best proof of how far the dramatic power of the poet has carried his subject into the higher regions of fancy. The drunken farmer (and this detail of liquor is not in the prose tale) rises above both his station in life and his condition for the moment, and becomes as interesting a hero as if he had been steel-clad knight or well-greaved Achæan. Carlyle has denied that *Tam o' Shanter* is properly a poem at all; his objections only seem to imply that it is not the kind of poem which he wanted. "The strange chasm," he says, "between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet is nowhere bridged over," —an objection that only a preconceived criticism could discover. The poem in fact is carefully planned to bring about the effect intended. The keynote is given in the very first lines, in the mention of the dangers to which the revellers of the market are exposed on their homeward journey. Then Tam is introduced, his character preparing the reader both for his probable condition before he leaves "auld Ayr," and for his behaviour in the events about to follow. Even the nature of these events is foreshadowed in Kate's prophecy, that

"late or soon,
Thou wad be found deep drowned in Doon,
Or catched wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk."

The scene in the inn, and the characters of those there assembled, are described as vividly, if less luridly, than that other alehouse scene in *The Jolly Beggars;* the pleasure is as deep, though less riotous,—

"Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious."

Then the scene begins to darken, a transition marked by the English lines ("But pleasures are like poppies spread," etc.), always the index of Burns's serious moods. To the cheerful fireside of the inn there succeed midnight and storm, such a night and such a tempest as the powers of darkness are sure to be abroad in. Tam can despise the storm, but not so easily the unseen terrors, which the poet himself has pled guilty to,* and can thus without injustice attribute to his courageous hero. These fears are increased by the various scenes of bygone tragedies passed on the way, and by the time Tam nears Alloway Kirk, the haunt of "ghaists and houlets," we have forgot all about the inn, and find no incongruity in witnessing with him the dread assemblage within the sacred walls. The apparatus of their awful meeting, the objects laid out for show in that chamber of horrors, all help to carry out the illusion; the bridge between the public-

* "Betty Davidson's stories," he writes, "had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical in these matters than I, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors." (Autobiography.)

house and the gate of hell is as complete as art can make it. In the sequel the tone is lighter, suiting with the nature of the catastrophe, nor could it have been otherwise, if the poet was to adhere to the tradition. Burns had no intention of carrying his readers "back into that dark, earnest, wondering age, when the tradition was believed, and when it took its rise." His treatment of the theme might have been anticipated from the *Address to the Deil* and *Halloween;* popular beliefs are to him a subject for humour and not for solemn treatment, although in *Tam o' Shanter* the humour is not the only note, but is combined with a serious and impressive strain. There *is* no tragedy, as Carlyle complains; there never was meant to be any, and the "awful warning to the Carrick farmers not to stay too late in Ayr Markets" is the only catastrophe and the only moral. But to deny that *Tam o' Shanter* is a poem because it has not converted the tale into a tragedy is a strange way of judging Burns. In no case has the general consensus of opinion justified Burns in his own estimate of his work more than here. He looked on it as his "standard performance in the poetical line," displaying "a force of genius and a finishing polish" that he despaired of ever excelling. "Go on," wrote Mr. Tytler, after warmly commending the poem, "write more tales in the same style, you will eclipse Prior and La Fontaine;" and Burns, to whom the praise "was the most delicious vibration that ever trilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet," wrote back that he was already revolving two or three stories in his fancy. They were never born as poems, and *Tam o' Shanter* remains unique among the creations of our poet.

About the same time as he was polishing this tale,

Burns was also "hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet." The result, in the case of one whom he had worshipped with so much admiration, is a disappointing one; it contains some of the ideas, but nothing of the charms, of that on Matthew Henderson. 1791.

The *Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots*, in which a sweet ballad simplicity, caught from the reading of *Percy's Reliques*, is mingled with deeper notes that are all his own, was a composition that pleased Burns 'beyond any effort of my Muse for a good while past." There is a pathos in it that is all the more painful from the fresh spring scenery in which it is set, and the language is free from every trace of jarring words or thoughts. That Burns should sympathize with the hapless queen was inevitable from his own nature and from his historic leanings; in a letter to Dr. Moore he expresses his satisfaction that the latter in one of his works had given the palm to the champion of Queen Mary.

In the *Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn*, "than which," says Professor Nichol, "there has been no finer tribute of genius to worth, since Simonides and Pindar exalted the fame of the kings of Syracuse," the poet mourns the death of his noble benefactor under the guise of an aged bard, whose spring and summer alike are past, and to whom "all the life of life is dead." The closing verse is the simplest and the best, but the whole poem is a striking instance how in cases of real feeling Burns naturally falls back upon his earlier forms. *The Lament* has much in it of *Man is made to mourn*, and although the touch is not always so sure, and the notes, if sweeter, not always so strong, yet there are in it thoughts as highly inspired and as perfectly expressed as in any of his earlier poems.

With this elegy for his noble patron the last full sheaf of Burns's poems is finished; what remains to be gleaned is scanty and of little worth. The five years of his life that are yet to come are devoted to song-making, the richness of which is in marked contrast to the poverty of his other verse. His mind was becoming less inclined than ever for sustained effort in composition, and his situation provided him with no striking themes, while in composing songs he had always the tune with its associations, or even its older words, to guide him into the proper mood and supply the necessary material for the expression which he alone could give to it.

During the remaining months of 1791, the year in which he wrote *Afton Water* and *Ae fond kiss*, besides many other songs published in the fourth volume of Johnson's *Museum*, there are only two or three laboured pieces, those *On Glenriddell's Fox breaking his chain* (a fragment only), *The Address to the Shade of Thomson*, a task set him by the Earl of Buchan, and bearing all the marks of task-work even in its finished shape. The *Epistle to John Maxwell* is more natural, but only contains one spark of his usual fire, while the *Second Epistle to Graham*, as already noted, is the end of his great design, *The Poet's Progress*. It was written out while suffering from an accident, but from his language Mr. Graham could hardly have expected that it was composed nearly three years before. "Along with two other pieces," he writes, "I enclose you a sheetful of groans, wrung from me in my elbow-chair, with one unlucky leg on a stool before me." The verses *On the Destruction of the Woods near Drumlanrig*,* while they

* There is some doubt, however, as to whether this poem is by Burns.

display the poet's attachment to woodland scenery as strongly and in much the same manner as those on the Falls of Bruar, are in the end rather an example of bathos. This is a fault rare in Burns, but it recurs in a poem of 1794, entitled *A Vision*, the opening verses of which have made it be called "a grand and thrilling ode"; there, after the poet has set before us the "stern and stalwart ghaist" of a minstrel whose motto is Liberty, he suddenly ends with—

> "He sang wi' joy his former day,
> He, weeping, wailed his latter times;
> But what he said—*it was nae play,*
> *I winna ventur't in my rhymes.*"

It was in the end of 1791 that Burns left Ellisland, and no poem appears throughout most of the following year, the year of *Willie Wastle*, *Kelly Burn Braes*, and *The Deil's awa' wi' th' Exciseman* on the one hand; of *Bessy and her Spinnin' Wheel*, *The Lea Rig*, and *Highland Mary* on the other. Only in its closing months do we find a prologue for Miss Fontenelle, *The Rights of Woman*, and some weak verses on the Earl of Buchan's belated patronage of Thomson. Another year passes before Miss Fontenelle again inspires an address, in which some lines may come from the poet's heart:— 1792. 1793.

> "Thou man of crazy care and ceaseless sigh,
> Still under bleak Misfortune's blasting eye;
> Doomed to that sorest task of man alive,—
> To make three guineas do the work of five."

It was very soon after this that the estrangement with the Riddells took place, followed by the death of Robert Riddell, for whom Burns composed a sonnet, remarkable more for its disregard of rule than for its poetic merits, however sincere the regret for the dead may have been. Less pleasing are 1794.

the "ill-natured things" levelled against his former friends, Maria and her husband. The *Epistle from Esopus to Maria*, on the model of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, belongs to these, and contains some vigorous if unkindly lines, in which the poet vents his wrath not only against Mrs. Riddell but against the Earl of Lonsdale as well. If Mrs. Riddell ever saw those productions, she displayed much magnanimity in not only forgiving Burns, but in writing a most sympathetic and eloquent estimate of his genius and character, in which she excuses even his propensity to undeserved satire.

Mrs. Riddell's remarks have so much bearing on Burns's epigrams, that it is most natural to speak of them in this connection. It is usual to deal with them rather severely, as being deficient both in point and polish, an example set by Dugald Stewart, who wrote that "his attempts at epigrams in his printed works are the only performances, perhaps, that he has produced totally unworthy of his genius." Burns only published nine epigrams and epitaphs, and withdrew three of them from his second edition; one of the remaining six is that for his father. It may readily be granted that the many epigrams composed by, or attributed to, Burns are not of first-class merit, some of them only of interest because they are by Burns; but a few of them have at least the merit of vigorous expression, and have greatly taken the popular fancy, which judges more by feeling than by rules of art. Here as in other cases, Burns is justified by the very audience he was addressing, and it is natural enough that the most favourite epigrams are those of a satirical cast, the kind from which "for every ten jokes he got a hundred enemies."

The *Ode for General Washington's Birthday* has Liberty

for its subject. "You know," he writes, "how dear the theme is to me." Josiah Walker, in the autumn of this year, heard him recite the closing lines of it "with marked and peculiar energy." This part is by far the best of the ode, but it can scarcely be ranked higher than his earlier attempts at the same form of composition.

The *Ballads on Mr. Heron's Election*, three in number, are compositions of 1795, and though not devoid of vigour, are even more local and uninteresting than those of five years before. The latter part of the year, it will be remembered, is a period that is all dark and clouded, no season for a poet's work:— 1795.

"Into thir dark and drublie days,
When sable all the heavens arrays
With misty vapours, cluds and skies,
Nature all courage me denies
Of sangs, of ballads, and of plays.*

Towards the closing days of the year come the *Verses to Collector Mitchell*, of a pathetic rather than poetic interest. In these, as in the *Epistle to Colonel De Peyster*, Burns falls back on the old familiar metre, untried for more than five years, but now made natural again by the associations of his theme. In the *Epistle* he moralizes on the world, the flesh, and the devil in a strain that has more of earnest than of humour in it. Satan is more real now, more dangerous, than he had seemed ten years before, when he was even an object for pity; he has only been biding his time. 1796.

"Ah Nick! ah Nick! it is na fair,
First showing us the tempting ware,
Bright wines and bonnie lasses rare,
To put us daft:
Syne weave, unseen, thy spider snare
O' hell's damned waft."

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* Dunbar.

"Lord, keep me aye frae a' temptation" had been his prayer ten years before; now he closes with "The Lord preserve us frae the devil," and so ends the long list of Burns's poems.

If during this second period we have found but little in the poems of Burns that is worthy of his genius, it must be admitted that there is much to account for this, and much more to compensate for it. His work in poetry was really ended when he had worked out the natural inspiration that compelled him to record in verse all the impressions of his early years. When he had told his own loves and griefs, when he had bound the magic of his verse round his people and his country, his original aim and ambition were fulfilled. His further powers were as yet unknown to him, to be developed as time and chance might determine. The most obvious line of development lay in his poems, but here his native impetuous stream was diverted, partly by natural influences, partly by outside forces, into the smooth and placid channels of contemporary verse, channels crowded with other craft as neat and trim as his could ever be. Study and careful polishing might in time have enabled Burns to hold his own even here, but for this his life gave him no leisure; as farmer and exciseman he must compose on the impulse of the moment, or desert the Muses altogether. False aims and engrossing cares are sufficient causes for the decay of Burns's poetry in this period of his life. But in the field of song he only now discovered his strength. His published volumes had contained only a handful of songs, but these were enough to show that he had a rare gift in wedding his words to music, a gift of which Scotland still stood in need to make her songs worthy of her airs. Dr. Moore, to do him justice, had seen this, and wrote to the poet

that he had "a peculiar talent for such compositions," which he ought to indulge. The works published by Johnson and Thomson gave Burns the very stimulus that was needed for the work, and the result was such that one can hardly join with Sir Walter Scott in regretting "that so much of his time and talents were frittered away in compiling and composing for musical collections." It may be strongly doubted whether the writing of songs "must necessarily have had no little effect in deterring him from undertaking any grave or important task." It is quite as probable that this wealth of lyric verse is the fresh budding and bursting into a thousand shoots of the tree that otherwise would have been slowly withering away, under mistaken attempts to cultivate it amid the storm and stress of an uncongenial life.

CHAPTER VI.

SONGS.

IT is a hard thing to do justice to the work of a great song-writer by any mere literary appreciation of its merits. The Muse of lyric verse appeals not only to the mind but to the ear, and her own tones must be heard if she is to be valued in all her worth. This is true of all songs, but it is doubly true of those of Burns, the whole of whose lyric verse was suggested and moulded by the music of his country. He did not write the song, and let the musician find the notes that could best express its particular shade of feeling; he found the music ready to his hand, and often the very emotion it was best fitted to express, and it was his task to clothe this existing form in the language it suggested to him. Hence the injustice of judging his songs merely by the words, however well some of them may stand the test. In speaking of them we can only hope to explain the circumstances under which they were produced, and to point out some of his characteristic features as a song-writer.

Old Scottish Songs.

As in his poems, so in his songs, Burns is a continuator, and yet original. He works on old foundations, on the old popular songs of his country, which had lived on the lips of aged dames and young maidens right down to his own day, or had found their way into printed books like

Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany*, or David Herd's collection of 1769. It may be doubted, however, whether any of these songs were very old; of the favourite ditties of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries little more than the titles have come down to us, and even where words are found to an old tune, we cannot be certain that they are the original ones. In what has been thus preserved there is sometimes no little merit, generally in broad humour or simple pathos, but the general level of the verse cannot be said to be very high, nor the taste of the singing public very refined. As Mr. Ramsay of Auchtertyre has said in apt if homely metaphor—"Though the seeds of poetry were scattered with a plentiful hand among the Scottish peasantry, the product was probably like that of pears and apples,—of a thousand that spring up, nine hundred and fifty are so bad as to set the teeth on edge; forty-five or more are passable and useful; and the rest of an exquisite flavour." Even to Burns's own songs this figure in a modified form might apply, but it is very true of the earlier material with which he worked, the coarse bricks which he overlaid with the white marble of his verse. For all that was truly beautiful in them he had a keen appreciation, which in concert with his superior art enabled him to bring out of them what the earlier singers had vaguely striven after. For the unknown authors of these songs and ballads of older days he had deep admiration and sympathy,—admiration for their talents, sympathy for the obscurity of their names and fates. "There is," he writes, "a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness in some of our ancient ballads, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand; and it has often given me many a heart-ache to reflect that such glorious old bards,—bards who very probably

owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such fine strokes of nature,—that their very names (oh, how mortifying to a bard's vanity) are now 'buried among the wreck of things that were.'" These words, confided to his Common-place Book in September 1785, show clearly that sympathetic feeling for the older song-writers, which in after years prompted much of his work for the two collections of Scottish music that were his pleasure and his pride. For the ancients, who had gone "to the world of deathless existence and immortal song," he had this unbounded admiration; for his contemporaries he had no jealousy, but rather desired to establish a brotherhood of poets, "among all the genuine sons of Scottish song."

Even for the places celebrated in these old lines he felt a deep interest, though few of them belonged to his native district. "I am such an enthusiast," he writes to Thomson, "that in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland, I made a pilgrimage to the individual spot from which any popular song took its rise, Lochaber and the Braes of Ballendean excepted."

From his earliest years these old songs were familiar to him, and it was in song that he found his first poetic expression. In his two earliest songs, *Handsome Nell*, and *Tibbie, I hae seen the day*, are contained the two key-notes of his life, and of many of his poems and songs; these are love and independence. Both notes are real and intense, coming from the very depths of his complex nature, and the songs that embody them are the fruits of actual experience. "You must know," he writes to Thomson, "that all my earlier love-songs were the breathings of ardent passion, and though it might have been easy

Burns's early songs.

in after-times to have given them a polish, yet that polish, to me whose they were, and who perhaps alone cared for them, would have defaced the legend of the heart which was so faithfully inscribed on them." To these souvenirs of early love belong *The Rigs o' Barley*, *My Nannie, O!* and *Mary Morison*, the second verse of which is perhaps as perfect as any in all his later work. While these, and others of the period, are wanting in the depth of universal feeling that marks his later lyrics, there is much in them that is of wonderful excellence, coming from a hand yet so new to the poet's craft. They are the separate items in which is manifested that wide, irresistible love towards all the fair, which soon found a more general expression in *Green grow the rashes, O.*

"There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
In ev'ry hour that passes, O;
What signifies the life o' man,
An 'twere na for the lasses, O?"

This, he says, "is the genuine language of my heart, and will enable anybody to determine which of the classes" (the grave or the merry) "I belong to." The classification so candidly avowed is one that of itself indicates the future bent of his song-craft.

His independence, on the other hand, appears not only in the song already named, but in several others, that on *The Ronalds of the Bennals*, and *Here's to thy health, my bonnie lass*, which is no doubt his own. The third verse, at least, is in perfect harmony with the ballad *My Father is a Farmer*, "a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification," but a most graphic picture of his position in life at that time, and of his own view of it,—a frame of mind echoed after many days in *Contented wi' little an' cantie wi' mair*, at a time when it was even more

necessary if less natural (1794). A less cheerful, though not despairing strain, is that of *Fickle Fortune*, the inspiration of which is caught from an old verse, set down "as a debt I owe to the author, as the repeating of that verse has lighted up my flame a thousand times." Darker shades, again, occur in the songs *I dreamed I lay*, or *The Ruined Farmer*, suggested by his father's misfortunes.

Such are the products of the song-writer's "prentice-hand," stray flashes kindled at the flame of the older minstrels; now, in his twenty-fifth year, he turned aside for a time from the path of song, and gave all his many-sided energy to the composition of those poems which won for him a name before any of his songs were known, except the three or four contained in the Kilmarnock edition. From the end of 1784 down to May 1786, there are few songs except those which constitute part of the plan of *The Jolly Beggars;* one, however, has become universally known and admired, the biographical lyric of *There was a lad was born in Kyle*, with its proud and prophetic anticipation of coming fame—

> "He'll hae misfortunes great an' sma',
> But aye a heart aboon them a';
> He'll be a credit till us a',
> We'll a' be proud o' Robin."

There is here an early consciousness of merit that heralds the full conviction of it attained in *The Vision*.

Strangely enough his love for Jean Armour inspired him at this time with no song of note; it is with Mary Campbell, and the prospect of leaving his native land, in the summer of 1786, that song again becomes his chosen vehicle of expression. *Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary?, My Highland Lassie*, together with *From thee, Eliza, I must go*, and the *Farewell Song to the Banks of*

Ayr, agree with his earlier songs in being the reflection of emotions that were for the time the prevailing ones in his mind. They are the pictures of different mental states, and their merit consists in the fidelity of the portrait. The circumstances under which the last-named was composed are well described (after Burns's own account) by Professor Walker, and show how much these mental states were influenced by his surroundings for the moment. This farewell to

> "The scenes where wretched Fancy roves,
> Pursuing past unhappy loves,"

might well have been the last of his songs, had not Fate conspired to keep him in his native land.

It is not at all unlikely that Burns's introduction as a member of the Edinburgh club of wits, known as the "Crochallan Fencibles," had much to do with re-awakening his interest in Scottish song, and determining his future bent. At all events his earliest attempts at adding verses to old songs are connected with members of this club, such as giving an extra verse for *Bonnie Dundee*, which was a favourite song with Mr. Cleghorn, one of its number. He did indeed write other songs to suit their free-and-easy tastes, of which only one or two have been allowed to present themselves among his works, and how far others which have appeared in print are by him or not, it is not easy to say. *My Lord a-hunting he is gane* is no doubt one of these, and, despite its theme, has lines in it, especially in the fourth verse, that foreshadow the future ease and simple beauty of his lyric masterpieces.

While some credit may thus be due to these lively companions at the club, two other and more important causes come in about the same time to fix Burns's attention on song-writing. One of these was the High-

land tour in the autumn of 1787, which gave a new zest to his Jacobitism, and made him an enthusiast in the matter of Highland airs. The other was the musical undertaking of James Johnson, of publishing with their proper airs all the old Scottish songs he could procure. The fact that Johnson was doing this "not from mercenary views, but from an honest Scotch enthusiasm," was enough to enlist the hearty sympathy of Burns, and to secure his co-operation in "collecting the old poetry, or sometimes for a fine air make a stanza, when it has no words."

Johnson's Museum.

This latter course was often a very necessary one, for in many cases little more than the air and its name survived at that date, and even where words did go with it, they were either poetically worthless or of a nature unfit for ears polite. To remedy both of these defects had been one of the aims of Allan Ramsay and other contributors to the *Tea-Table Miscellany;* but their work erred again in being too artificial, and so harmonizing badly with the older scraps which they retained, and with the simplicity of the music. Strephon and Damon, Delia and Chloe, in all the polish of literary English, are unnatural tenants of the same valleys with Jockie and Sandie, Nancy and Meg, whose tongue is of the broadest Doric, while in many cases the indelicacy of the originals is only less coarsely expressed. "That the modest voice and ear of the fair singer might meet with no affront," is one of Ramsay's avowed intentions; the matter of his Miscellany is a curious illustration of it. Even in Johnson's *Museum* the taste is not overfastidious, but it would no doubt have been worse but for the hand of Burns, which is only laid on the old verses for their good. In this respect the epithet of

"inspired scavenger" is not inaccurate, however inadequate it may be.

Henceforward Burns is so great an enthusiast for Scottish song and Scottish music, that one is inclined to join with Hogg in his protest against Murdoch's statement, that Burns's ear was dull for music. The defect, if it really existed, was soon got rid of, for at an early age the poet could derive inspiration from an air. "These old Scottish airs," he says (in 1785), "are so nobly sentimental that when one would compose to them, to 'south the tune,' as our Scotch phrase is, is the readiest way to catch the inspiration, and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry." At a much later time (1793) the working out of this principle appears in the account given to Thomson of his method of composition. "Until I am complete master of a tune, in my own singing (such as it is) I never can compose for it. My way is: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for subjects in nature around me that are in unison and harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my Muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on." Few poets have given a more interesting glimpse into the mysteries of their art than Burns has done in this note by the way.

George Thomson shares with Johnson the credit of having drawn from Burns his finest songs; for him he furnished some seventy during the last four years of his life, for Johnson he wrote or mended nearly two hundred. In the latter case he did not openly acknowledge all his work;* much of our information regarding the pieces to be attributed to Burns depends on his notes in an interleaved copy of the *Museum* presented to Robert Riddell, and even more on the statements of William Stenhouse, who had access to the original manuscripts, and wrote notes for a new edition of Johnson's work. Many of these unacknowledged pieces were no doubt little esteemed by their author; they were mere makeshifts to provide words for the old airs, and Johnson was more easily satisfied than Thomson. In the Glenriddell note on the verses *To the weavers gin ye go* (No. 103), Burns himself refers to this as follows:—"The chorus of the song is old; the rest of it is mine. Here once for all, let me apologize for many silly compositions of mine in this work. Many beautiful airs wanted words; in the hurry of other avocations, if I could string a parcel of rhymes together anything near tolerable, I was fain to let them pass. He must be an excellent poet, indeed, whose every performance is excellent." The natural result of this is that beyond a certain *curiosa felicitas*, partly due to Burns himself and partly to the older words or airs, a large number of these songs have no great bearing on the place of Burns in literature. They swell his work;

* "Those marked Z. I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but in fact, of a good many of them, little more than the chorus is ancient, tho' there is no reason for telling everybody this piece of intelligence." (Letter to Mrs. Dunlop, Nov. 13, 1788.)

they show his happy skill in simple expression; but they are not to be compared with the best products of his genius.

It also follows that, taken as a whole, the songs of Burns have not the same relation to his own life that his poetry has. They are not the inevitable expression of his own feelings, "raging like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme;" but rather the effect of inspiration from without, although they may often harmonize with the emotion of the moment, and take their colouring from it. This very fact, however, lends to his best songs a greater range of feeling, a greater power of appealing to all the world; they may be Scottish in outward form, but their soul is world-wide, and the emotions they convey are those which lie close to the hearts of all. It is here that Burns transcends the confines of his country, and the limitations of his birth, and enters into the common literature of all the nations.

The Scottish form was one that the poet himself insisted on, conscious that in it lay his real strength. "If you are for English verses," he wrote to Thomson, "there is on my part an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue." Or again, "Let me remark to you, in the sentiment and style of our Scottish airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call the Doric style and dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue and manners is particularly, nay, peculiarly appropriate."*

* The Scottish element is generally very slight, just sufficient to give colouring to the words. Only in some humorous songs does he at all approach the graphic use of his own dialect that

In the technique of the songs, mainly in the rhymes, there is often an apparent carelessness which is really due to an artistic intention. While the rhymes of the older Scottish poets had been extremely strict and correct, those of the popular ballads and songs, either originally or by a process of corruption, were loose and inexact, partaking more of the character of assonance than of rhyme proper. Burns had at an early date noticed this feature in his models,—"a certain happy arrangement," he calls it, "and yet very frequently nothing, not even *like* rhyme or sameness of jingle, at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, independent of rhyme altogether." This he wrote in 1785, and although he did not venture to dispense with rhyme altogether, some of his early songs, such as *My Nannie, O*, show the same conscious licence in the matter of endings that also appears in his later lyrics, notably in *Highland Mary*.

Love Songs.

In the great majority of Burns's later songs love continued to be his favourite theme. He felt that in deep, honest love lay all that was sweetest and best in life, and that in singing of it he was discharging his truest mission as a poet. "Love," he

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appears in the poems. The "*Scottish* Song inscribed to Alex. Cunningham" (beginning "Now Spring has clad the grove in green") is a good illustration of what Burns meant by "a sprinkling of our native tongue;" except for forms like *a'*, *o'*, *a'*, *n'e*, *an e*, *i'th*, the song is altogether English. The "*Scots* Prologue for Mr. Sutherland" is another instance.—His partiality for a Scottish colouring, however, led him sadly astray when he perverted Sir Robert Aytoun's, "I do confess thou'rt smooth and fair," and complacently added, "I think that I have improved the simplicity of the sentiments by giving them a Scots dress."

wrote to his friend Cunningham, "is the Alpha and Omega of human enjoyment. All the pleasures, all the happiness of my humble compeers, flow immediately and directly from this delicious source. It is the spark of celestial fire which lights up the wintry hut of poverty, and makes the cheerless mansion warm, comfortable, and gay. It is the emanation of Divinity that preserves the sons and daughters of rustic labour from degenerating into the brutes with which they daily hold converse. Without it, life to the poor inmates of the cottage would be a damning gift." To one who could write of love with such enthusiasm, the passion itself was sure to be an inspiration, and out of it sprang some of his most world-famed lyrics. Some of these, like his early songs, are records of real love; others are only poetic fictions, even when inspired by actual objects of admiration; others again are of perfectly general content, the embodiment of a love that is not determined by person, time, or place. It was difficult, almost impossible, for Burns to write a song to any fair one in whom he was at all interested, without assuming the tone of the lover, and his manner of expressing himself in such cases has supplied Jeffrey with reasons for charging him with want of chivalrous feeling. "He has written," says that critic, "with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatsoever,—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and 'sweet austere composure' of women of refinement." The justice of the criticism is supported by such passages as the closing verses of *The Lass o' Ballochmyle;* in other complimentary songs the tone is less ardent, if it is still that of the lover rather than the friend, and one may well believe that the admiration of Burns for a beautiful

woman only found its natural expression in love-verses, without thereby denying him all share in the courteous gallantry of ancient knighthood.

Of mere complimentary songs he wrote many, which need not be reckoned up; some of them are good of their kind, but they are seldom among the best of his work, and hardly one of them is numbered among his most popular songs. Very different is it in the cases where the compliment takes the form of a direct avowal of love, as in the songs inspired by Jean Lorimer ("Chloris") during the years 1793 to 1795. Burns himself avers that all the warmth of the songs was merely the poetic colouring of friendly esteem, and presents a copy of his poems to her as "the lady whom in so many fictitious reveries of passion, but with the most ardent sentiments of real friendship, I have so often sung under the name of Chloris." If his words are really accurate, and the songs to Chloris are mere emanations of his favourite "regimen of admiring a fine woman," * one can see how readily his admiration tended to express itself in the language of love. To these belong *O poortith cauld and restless love*, *Sae flaxen were her ringlets*, *Lassie wi' the lint-white locks*, *O wat ye wha's in yon toun*, and *This is no my ain lassie*, with others, nearly a score in all. Well might he tell Thomson, "I assure you that to my lovely friend you are indebted for many of your best songs of mine." What caused him, in Feb. 1796, to propose to withdraw her name altogether from his songs, and to deny the beauty of "flaxen locks," is very hard to conjecture. In the case of Jessie Lewars also, who attended him in his illness, the tone of his songs is entirely that of the hopeless lover,—

* See the whole passage in the letter to Thomson of Oct. 19, 1794, and its sequel in the one following.

"Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in the world beside."

The note of passion, however, disappears in the pure beauty of *O wert thou in the cauld blast*, one of the very last of his songs.

Of songs that Burns would have admitted to be the expression of real love, there are but few in this later period, one or two to Jean Armour, to Clarinda, and to the memory of Highland Mary. His newly-wedded wife inspired *Of a' the airts the wind can blaw* and *O were I on Parnassus' hill*, but married love, the poet confesses, did not yield him much food for poetry. The memory of Mary, three years after her death, is immortalized in *To Mary in Heaven*, in which the one jarring note in the general harmony is perhaps to be found in the lines—

"See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hearest thou the groans that rend his breast?"

where both words and thought are wanting in the liquid melody that pervades the other verses. The song does not require the romantic account of its composition given by Mrs. Burns to make it live. Three years later saw another undying ode to the same love of other days, that beginning with

"Ye banks and braes and streams around
The castle of Montgomery,"

of which the poet himself thought highly, though "perhaps," he says, "after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition."

In the case of Clarinda, as in those of Jean Armour and Highland Mary, the best inspiration came long

after the first love. The verses adressed to her at the close of their acquaintance in Edinburgh (*Clarinda, mistress of my soul*) are best in their opening lines. It was nearly four years later, after some estrangement, and on the eve of her departure for Jamaica, that Burns saw her in Edinburgh and took farewell of her—a parting celebrated in the songs, *O May, thy morn was ne'er sae sweet, Ae fond kiss and then we sever*, and *Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December.* The second of these contains the lines in which, according to Scott, lie "the essence of a thousand love tales"—

> "Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
> Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
> Never met—or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

The rest of the song is less remarkable, showing a want of simplicity and spontaneity in lines like

> "Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee;
> Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee."

The sincerity of these songs is no doubt of the same kind as that of his letters to her; the poet may have really felt what he said, buf chiefly because he wished to say it. The desire to write parting songs even led him to appropriate one from an old "Edinburgh Magazine" of 1774, *Behold the hour, the boat, arrive*, on which he made a few changes, and forwarded it without any explanation of its origin. It is possible that *My Nannie's awa'* may refer to the same fair one; in that case it is the most natural of all the songs devoted to her.

Despite the living passion that inspires these songs, it is in those which deal with love in its more general aspect, that Burns is most universally successful. There are perhaps some fifty songs of sterling worth in

which he has entered into almost every serious phase of love, besides another score or so in which its humorous side, one dear to the old Scottish poets, is brought out in all its various lights. Among these are to be found some of the most perfect specimens of Burns's lyrical genius, by which his position as a song-writer has largely been fixed in the estimate of his country. To the former class belong a few that may be placed in the front rank, such as *Flow gently, sweet Afton*, which has in it a sacred calm, nowhere else perhaps to be found in his work; *The Lea Rig*, a chastened counterpart to his earlier *Rigs o'Barley*, and the finest expression of the gloaming interview of lovers; *Ca' the yowes to the knowes* (the later version, which is his own); *The Posie*, where all the flowers of spring and summer are gathered in an exquisite if rather impossible bouquet for his "ain dear May"; *O my love's like a red, red rose*, perhaps suggested by the old stanza "O gin my love were yon red rose," but of which no version is known earlier than Burns's. There are songs too of parting and parted lovers, some perhaps suggested by his own life-story. Such are *My Nannie's awa'*, *Go, fetch to me a pint o' wine* (which he tried at first to put forth as an old composition), *Musing on the roaring ocean*, *Lo'n in Braes*, *Wandering Willie*, and *How long and dreary is the night*. It is in the last of these that the lagging of time to the parted ones is so beautifully expressed—

> "How slow ye move, ye heavy hours,
> As ye were wae an' weary!
> It wasna sae ye glinted by,
> When I was wi' my dearie."

Nor has the poet forgotten the deeper woes than parting that may spring from love: nowhere is its final unhappiness more sweetly told of than in *Ye banks an'*

braes o' bonnie Doon, the final result of more than one revision, in the course of which it was altered to suit another tune, now inseparably wedded to the plaintive words. From another song, *Oh, open the door to me, oh*, Carlyle has selected for his praise a verse which "gives in a single line, to the saddest feeling, the saddest environment and local habitation."

> "The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,
> *And Time is setting with me, oh;*
> False friends, false love, farewell! for more
> I'll ne'er trouble them nor thee, oh."

It must be added, however, that the song is only altered from an Irish one, and as this has not been found, it is possible that the line is of a more Celtic melancholy than that of Burns.

The opposition between love and wealth, between youthful fancy and parental prudence, is one that naturally awakes the sympathy of Burns, and enlists it on the side of the young lovers against their less romantic elders. In *Auld Rob Morris* it is the lovelorn swain of low degree who sighs after the daughter of the bonnet-laird; in others it is the devoted maid who is determined to have the youth of her choice in spite of all. Hence the merry sauciness of *O for ane an' twenty, Tam*, or *Whistle an' I'll come to you, my lad*, the loving faithfulness of *The Collier Laddie*, the quaint seeking after counsel in *Tam Glen*, or the complaint and comforting resolve in *What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man?* The whole contest between wealth and love is sententiously summed up in *The Country Lass* ("In simmer when the hay was mawn"), where "blythe Bessie" meets the "gude advisement" of the aged dame with words that give the final position on one side of the antinomy. It is love like this, matured by

years, that finds its natural issue in the quiet content and well-won rest of *John Anderson, my jo.**

While Burns in his serious love-songs has seldom touched on its more material aspects, it was natural that in lighter moods he should be affected by the licence of the older songs, which looked at the humorous side of things, and were meant to raise a laugh rather than draw a tear. The early Scottish poets, more especially Dunbar and Lyndsay, together with many songs of later date, bring out clearly the common taste of their countrymen in such matters. In his contributions to this class of songs, Burns was in many cases simply recasting the older versions, and their sins are hardly to be reckoned against him, considering how much he did to improve them, and often to import some redeeming touch into an otherwise worthless set of words. The morality of *Wha is that at my own bower door?* or *To the weavers gin ye go*, is not very lofty, but it is one that was thought a fit subject for song for at least several centuries of both Scottish and English life. That Burns did not disdain to add to the number of these songs is certain enough, but those included in his works have nearly always the justification of an older and ruder model. One song, however, must stand by itself as deriving its merit from pure humour without any baser admixture, that of *Duncan Gray*, in which all the rude suggestion of the older words is obliterated, and replaced by a bright interior, similar in design but superior in effect to Henryson's *Robene and Makyne*. The moral of the old pastoral, that "he that will not when he may shall nocht have when

* The form is old; the content may have been suggested by the Rev. John Skinner's *Old Man's Song*, forwarded to Burns by the author.

he wald," is generously dispensed with, and the despairing lover's sorrow and anger find a happy ending, that converts the imminent tragedy into the pleasantest of comedies. Another fit subject for song to the mind of these times was found in the relations of husband and wife, after the style of *The Auld Guidman*, and this is a theme which Burns has presented in different aspects in a small number of songs, some of them humorous enough. The more conventional complaint of woman's tyranny inspires a few others, such as the ballad of *Kellyburn Braes*, *My spouse Nancy*, and the summing up of all in *Whistle o'er the lave o't.*

"A great critic on songs," Burns writes, "says that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing." In that case his contributions to the latter theme are not commensurate with what he has done for the former. Burns wrote very few drinking-songs, beyond his mending of older ones, such as *No Churchman am I*, and *John Barleycorn* in his early days, and snatches like *Landlady, count the lawin* in his later work. Of original songs connected with the worship of Bacchus there are only two that need be mentioned,—*The Whistle*, which is the poetical history of a famous drinking-match; and *Willie brew'd a peck o' maut*, where the "barley-bree" is the accompaniment to the joyous meeting of "three merry boys," who will not be parted by the shining of the moon, the crowing of the cock, or the dawning of the day. In its way *Auld Lang Syne* is almost as much of a drinking-song; it is over the "pint-stoup," and "a right gude-willie waught," that the memories of old days come back to the long-parted friends. The song itself, so strangely disclaimed by Burns, is the final outcome of many efforts by different hands, some rude and some artificial,

Drinking Songs.

moulded at last into its abiding form by the art of our poet himself.

Those songs of Burns which are not love-songs are mainly patriotic or political, and only a few of these are of strongly outstanding merit. His Jacobite sympathies supply him with not a few themes in this connection, beginning with his Highland tour in 1787. The nature of his Jacobitism has been referred to already; he seems to have taken it up more as a source of inspiration than from any political sense of its justice. "When political enthusiasm," he writes in 1791, "ceases to be the object of Princes and Patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of Historians and Poets." The history of Jacobite minstrelsy is a curious one, the main feature of which Burns has well expressed in these lines. The actual political ferment produced very little verse of any value, and Burns himself added few of what are now to be reckoned among the favourite Jacobite songs, most of which were written at a time when the feelings they embody were no longer seriously cherished. They take their origin from poetic sympathy, not from serious politics. Of the score or so of Jacobite effusions to be found among the work of Burns, only two or three are in his best style,—*Kenmure's on an' awa, It was a' for our richtfu' king*, and *Charlie is my darling;* and even in the case of these it is very difficult to say how much is his own. In the second of them occurs the verse borrowed by Sir Walter Scott in Rokeby.

Political Songs.

"He turn'd him richt and round about,
Upon the Irish shore,
And ga'e his bridle-reins a shake,
With adieu for evermore, my dear,
And adieu for evermore."

That the verse occurs in a stall-ballad is only of weight if the ballad were printed before the song appeared, and so far this has not been made out. Of the other songs, that on the *Battle of Sherramuir* is merely the result of cutting down an older ballad by the Rev. John Barclay, and others of the series may be more or less based on lost originals.

In one of the poet's letters a great enthusiasm is expressed for the older scenes of Scottish history, a desire to "sit and muse on those once hard-contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame; and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song." * The ambition was not realized in the way one might have expected; with one notable exception the battlefields of which he sings are those of civil strife —Sherramuir, Killiecrankie, and Culloden. That exception is Bannockburn, a scene which he viewed with feelings of excited patriotism, and the story of which interested him more than almost anything else in history. When in 1793 thoughts of Liberty and Independence were surging in his mind, the theme returned to him in connection with an old tune said to have been the Scottish march upon that occasion,† and so arose

* Letter to the Earl of Buchan (Feb. 3, 1787); the words echo some lines in the *Address to Edinburgh*, and the same idea recurs in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop (March 25, 1787).

† Some sympathy for the French Revolution had also a share in the production; "the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature *not quite so ancient*, roused my rhyming mania." John Syme asserted that Burns composed the song while in his company in a storm in the wilds of Kenmure, apparently on Aug. 1, 1793. Burns, writing to Thomson on Sept. 1, says that he composed it in his "yesternight's evening walk."

the lines of what has been accepted as the Scottish National Anthem, "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." There is a vigour and sternness in the lines, which, together with their striking tune, has carried them right into the heart of Scottish patriotism. The poet's feeling with regard to this tune (overruled for a time, to the wreck of the song, by Thomson's intermeddling), has universally commended itself; and the native spirit of the whole has made his countrymen overlook the fact that the form, as in so many of his songs, is only Scottish on the surface.*

For the history of his country Burns did little more in song. The promise made to Mrs. Dunlop to commemorate Wallace remained unfulfilled, just as the drama on Bruce was never written. Other scenes of Scottish story he did not touch, except in his ballad of *Caledonia*—a summary of native triumphs over foreign foes, ending in a marvellous mathematical figure. *The Dumfries Volunteers* is patriotic enough, but it is for Britain, not for Scotland; to it belong four well-known lines—

"The kettle o' the kirk an' state,
Perhaps a clout may fail in't,
But de'il a foreign tinkler loun
Shall ever ca' a nail in't."

At a time when the Government dreaded nothing more than disaffection among the people, the effect of the song was for the good of national feeling, while it may

* "Scots *wha*," and "Scots *wham*," are unnatural constructions in Scottish, which would use *that* for the relative, and even *has* instead of *hae*. The third, fifth, and sixth verses are pure English (except *die*, pronounced *dee*). The last verse is suggested by a couplet in Hamilton's version of Blind Harry's Wallace—

"A false usurper sinks in every foe,
And Liberty returns with every blow."

have restored the confidence of some who had come to look on Burns with dark suspicions as to his politics. While the poet, however, declared his admiration for the British constitution in no uncertain phrases, he had a vehement hatred of "that horrid mass of corruption called politics and state-craft," and especially of those "mighty villains who divide kingdom against kingdom, desolate provinces, and lay nations waste, out of the wantonness of ambition." This is the thought which underlies the sweet pathos of *Logan Braes*, *The Soldier's Return*, and *On the seas and far away*. The last is certainly inferior to the other two, and Thomson's objections to it are not unjust; but the closing verse,

> "Peace, thy olive wand extend,
> And bid wild War his ravage end,
> Man with brother Man to meet,
> And as a brother kindly greet,"

contains another conception of that brotherhood of man, which is the crowning maxim of *A man's a man for a' that*. It may well be doubted whether any song by Burns has made him more famous among men of other nations, than this spirited declaration of a dignity in man that is independent of worldly rank and title—

> "The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
> Is king o' men for a' that."

It is not the fault of Burns that he has sometimes been misunderstood, as if he had implied that all men were equal in gifts and rights; "sense and worth" are his criterion of the true member of his universal brotherhood.

"Let me make the songs of a people," runs the oft-quoted saw attributed to Fletcher of Saltoun, "and I care not who makes their laws." While Burns was inveighing against the statesmen of his day, he was

doing a work that should last as long as theirs, and hold as high a place in the history of his people. Scotland has had no lack of song-writers since Burns, as it had many before him, sweet singers who may even at times rise to his level, but no one has done so much for the glory of Scottish song as he did. He has made of it a treasury into which later hands may heap fresh wealth, but can never enrich it with finer ore. The task was greater than one may readily comprehend. "Those who think that composing a Scottish song is a trifling business, let them try it!" is his own challenge to his critics. The true song is indeed one of the rarest and most difficult forms of poetry; but the simplicity, depth, and directness of suggestion, which are its real essence, were qualities which, from the first, were strong in the verse of Burns. The springs both of laughter and of tears were ever welling up in his strongly emotional being; and where the feeling was a true one, the expression was full of a natural strength and sweetness that was music in itself, and flowed together with the melody of older days to form the perfect song. That all, that even the majority of his songs, are perfect no one will assert, but to regret with Scott "that so much of his time and talents was frittered away" in these years of devotion to Scottish song, is surely to misunderstand both the genius of Burns and the greatness of his work. The drama on Bruce, for which Scott sighs, could hardly have revealed the poet in a brighter halo than these lyric flashes of his varied genius, or given him a greater hold upon the hearts of men. His poems raised him from the obscurity of his native parish, and gave him a place in the literature of Britain. His songs have entitled him to rank among the poets of the world.

CHAPTER VII.

LETTERS.

In editions of the "complete works" of Burns, the poetry is rivalled in quantity by the prose. This prose, however, consists almost entirely of letters, of which between five and six hundred have now appeared in print;* others are no doubt still extant in private collections. These letters are especially interesting for the light they throw upon the facts of his life, mainly from about the time he began to attract public notice in 1786, and are, as Motherwell says, "peculiarly valuable as forming the best of all narratives of the outgoings and incomings—nay, even the shortcomings, waywardnesses, and wanderings of that most original, extraordinary, and master-spirit." At the same time they often serve as commentaries on his poetical work, for many of the thoughts which inspire his verse are echoed in fuller, though not more striking, words in one or other of the letters. The whole series of his correspondence with George Thomson is also an indispensable guide to the dates and motives of his later song-writing.

* Five hundred and thirty-four is the number of those given in Vols. IV., V., VI. of the edition by W. Scott Douglas (1878-79), which is the standard text of the letters.

To Burns his formal letters were as much efforts of composition as his poems or songs; perhaps the effort was even greater in prose than in verse. This habit of composition was a practice very early begun—immediately after his return from Kirkoswald. "I had met," he says, "with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three farthings' worth of business in the world, yet every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of day-book and ledger."

Formal Letters.

The practice of drafting his letters before finally writing them out is the origin of the collection made by Burns for his friend Robert Riddell, as explained in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop of December 15, 1793. "I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters*—I mean those which I first sketched in a rough draft, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which from time to time I had parcelled by, as trash that was scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy, I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out in a bound MS. for my friend's library. As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the

* The MS., however, contains only twenty-eight letters, including an abridged copy of the early Common-place Book. The earliest letter is that to Arnot of Dalquhatswood, April 1786. Currie only printed five letters from this MS., considering the others "of inferior merit, or otherwise unfit for the public eye."

commencement of our acquaintance." When part of his correspondence was first printed in Currie's edition of his works (1800), some of the letters there given were taken from these scrolls. "Though many of the letters," says the editor, "are printed from originals furnished by the persons to whom they were addressed, others are printed from first drafts or sketches found among the papers of our bard. Though in general no man committed his thoughts to his correspondents with less consideration or effort than Burns, yet it appears that in some instances he was dissatisfied with his first essays, and wrote out his communications in a fairer character, or perhaps in more studied language."

In many of his letters, then, Burns was aiming at literary merit, and may fairly be judged by literary standards of composition. Many others, of course, especially many of those gleaned by the various editors who came after Currie, are not of this formal kind, being mere notes and hasty communications, important often for our knowledge of his life, or for our estimate of his character, but not in any way to be considered among his literary work. In the case of many letters also much has been done by these editors* to restore the full text, where Dr. Currie for various reasons gave to the world an imperfect or garbled copy, a course sometimes rendered advisable by consideration for living interests and feelings, but sometimes, so far as can be seen, quite wanton and unwarranted.

Style of the Letters.

In the tone of Burns's letters there is a most remarkable variety, agreeing with the character of the person whom he is addressing. In fact, few writers adapt themselves more to the

* Especially by Mr. W. Scott Douglas in the edition already referred to.

tastes of each correspondent than Burns. He is humorous and free with his bosom friends, sentimental and passionate with Clarinda, respectful and respectable with Mrs. Dunlop, deferential yet independent with men of rank; nevertheless, one can see that it is the same hand that guides the pen through all these changes, the same mind that manifests itself in these various moods, with a versatility that is very characteristic of Burns. Great as is the range of his verse, it is hardly greater than that of his prose; and no doubt we have in these letters, in the absence of a Boswell, the most complete copy left to us of that power of conversation which so impressed all who knew him. "Poetry," Mrs. Riddell goes so far as to say, "was actually not his *forte*," and from the letters one can partly imagine what his talk might have been, where the expression would to a great extent be free from the conventional style of his prose. Their cardinal defect is that the subjects are often forced, and the style unnatural. On this point critics have disagreed, but the majority have admitted the defect in style caused by too much elaboration of the language. "They bear," says Jeffrey, "as well as his poetry, the seal and impress of his genius; but they contain much more bad taste, and are written with far more apparent labour. . . . There are few of them written with simplicity or plainness, and though natural enough as to the sentiment, they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression." The criticism, which Jeffrey puts in its strongest form, has much truth in it, but, like many other true criticisms, it may give an inadequate idea of the subject it sums up. Josiah Walker's verdict is a much truer one, which points out that the style of the letters is affected to a great extent by the tastes of

the various correspondents. It must, however, be admitted that in his prose, in marked contrast to his best and most natural verse, Burns does not seem to have appreciated the force of simplicity—a fault which Dugald Stewart has noticed in his reminiscences of the poet. What he aims at, in his more ambitious letters, those which were really the result of some effort, is a wealth of phrase and abundance of epithet, an elaboration of metaphor or simile that is often ingenious and as often tedious, so that the sentence becomes overloaded with a crowd of subordinate clauses, which not unfrequently either weaken its force or render its meaning obscure. Some idea, trivial enough in itself, is seized upon and spun out in this fashion, until the thread of the discourse is at the breaking-point. This defect appears most frequently in his later epistles, where he is addressing correspondents to whom he has no very personal news to communicate, and is casting about for something to write to them. Still, with all their faults of style, there is much in the letters of Burns that is of great interest, whether in a serious or humorous strain, and no view of his work can be complete which does not take some account of them.

Early Letters.

Of his early correspondence, down to 1786, only some twelve or thirteen letters have been preserved, and the earliest of these are the four addressed to Alison Begbie in 1780-1. They are certainly "vastly different from the ordinary style of courtship," and bear more manifest traces of practice in composition than in love-making, but they are remarkable letters, and contain sentiments which he continued to hold all through life. One of these occurs in the first of the series: "I grasp every creature in the arms of Universal Benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of

the happy, and sympathize with the miseries of the unfortunate." The same thought recurs in a letter of 1790. "God knows I am no saint: I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could (and I believe I do it as far as I can) I would wipe all tears from all eyes."

The letter to his father of December 1781 is more natural in style, and the general despair expressed in it is in perfect harmony with the tone of the religious verses belonging to the same period. No further correspondence is preserved till the beginning of 1783, when the letter to John Murdoch gives a vivid picture of his position in life at that time,—the same view as he had already sketched in the ballad of *My Father was a Farmer*. "I scorn to fear the face of any man living," is a strong expression of that independence of character which marked him in after-life. The letters of this and the following year to his cousin, James Burness in Montrose, are also written in a very natural style, and contain accounts of the state of the county, and of the religious fanatics known as the Buchanites, that are extremely interesting.

Among the letters is generally printed the Commonplace Book begun in April 1783, in which Burns recorded his thoughts and verses, not without the hope that they might one day be thought worthy of perusal. "I had meant," he says in his introductory note to the copy in the Glenriddell MS., "that the book should have lain by me, in the fond hope that some time or other, even after I was no more, my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of appreciating their value." The description of himself with which these notes open is very characteristic,—"a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it, but was, however, a man of some sense,

Commonplace Book.

a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature rational or irrational." The closing entry is of October 1785, breaking off abruptly with the words—"In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity." The advice is that of the *Epistle to a young friend*, and in his later letters religion is a favourite theme, largely, however, in the form of speculations on the reality of a future life as a recompense for the injustice of this.

The first remarkable letter that meets us after perusing these entries in his note-book, is that addressed to John Arnot of Dalquhatswood, already alluded to (p. 17) in connection with the first troubles caused by his attachment to Jean Armour. This letter was carefully copied by its author into the Glenriddell MS., but remained unpublished till 1878. It is a combination of the serious and burlesque that, quite apart from the circumstances with which it deals, renders it most curious reading. The loss of his love, so pathetically mourned in *The Lament*, is here narrated in this quaint fashion: "I have lost, sir, that dearest earthly treasure, that greatest blessing here below, that last, best gift which completed Adam's happiness in the garden of bliss; I have lost—I have lost—my trembling hand refuses its office, the frightened ink recoils up the quill—Tell it not in Gath—I have lost—a—a—a wife!" The rest of the letter is in keeping with the commencement, and displays an exuberance of imagery and wealth of illustration that is hardly equalled in any other of his epistles. Jeffrey has pointed out the striking image in the letter to Dr. Moore, where the poet compares his early stirrings of ambition to "the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave." No less picturesque in its own way is the one already quoted from this letter, where he

describes himself as "fixed in stuporific insensibility, silent, sullen, staring, like Lot's wife besaltified in the plains of Gomorrha."

Humorous Letters.

Burlesque, in fact, is one of the favourite, perhaps one of the most successful styles that Burns adopts in his letters. There is certainly a tendency to overdo it, and to make the humour consist in mere accumulations of bombast, as in the letters to Peter Hill on Edinburgh magistrates and the praise of Frugality (April 2, 1789); to Robert Aiken on Dr. McGill's assailants (Aug. 1789), which Jeffrey solemnly criticized as if it were serious; to Alexander Cunningham on the difficulty of letter-writing (Sept. 10, 1792); or to William Nicol (Feb. 10, 1793), who had written him in a pleasant strain of sarcasm on his imprudence in Politics. Lockhart unjustly alludes to Nicol's letter as "a certain solemn lecture": it is entirely in jest, and is quite as clever as Burns's reply to it. In other letters, however, there is a genuine fund of humour quite apart from the extravagance of the style, as in the one sent to Charles Sharpe of Hoddam under a fictitious name, in the character of an itinerant ballad-maker (April 22, 1791). Yet even from the midst of this humorous epistle there spring out some of the poet's favourite sentiments clothed in well-set terms. "Fortune has so much forsaken me that she has taught me to live without her, and amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy, than a monarch of the world . . . I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect." One is also inclined to suspect that a sense of humour and sly sarcasm is at the bottom of the letter to the Rev. Arch. Alison, author of *Essays on Taste* (Feb. 14,

1791),—a letter which surprised Dugald Stewart by its "distinct conception of the general principles of the doctrine of association."

Returning to the letters of 1786, most of those which were written before his arrival in Edinburgh are more of biographical than literary interest; some of them indeed are touching enough in connection with the story of his life. The letter addressed to Mrs. Stewart of Stair, in September or October, is interesting as his first approach to one very much his superior in rank, and the tone of it gives the cue of his manner towards his other patrons. An intention of being respectful yet independent, of combining "a certain disqualifying pride of heart" with gratitude for what he feels to be favours received—such was the difficult attitude Burns always endeavoured to maintain, the attitude of the Edinburgh dedication, and of many letters then and afterwards,—those to the Earls of Glencairn and Eglinton, or to Mr. Graham of Fintry.

Later Epistles.

From his first winter in Edinburgh onwards the series of his letters is fairly complete, and supplies much material to the biographer. His correspondents were numerous, including various Edinburgh acquaintances like Nicol, Ainslie, Cunningham, and Dunbar, who are addressed in different styles suited to their respective characters. To Nicol he wrote his only letter in Scottish, dated from Carlisle, June 1, 1787, in a style which scarcely makes one wish for more specimens of the kind. It is in some of these letters that the worst faults of his prose style appear, caused apparently by a lack of matters of common interest after a year or two's separation from his correspondents, and an attempt to make up for this by fine writing. Probably he also knew that his friends expected some-

thing striking or amusing from his pen, and endeavoured to gratify their expectations. It is to these letters, more than any others, that the criticisms of Jeffrey apply.

Literary matters, except with direct reference to his own work, as in the correspondence with Thomson, are seldom the theme of his letters, although in one or two cases he gives detailed criticisms of works like Dr. Cririe's *Address to Loch Lomond*, or Miss Williams's poem on the Slave Trade. His letters to Dr. Moore contain a good deal of information about his own work, particularly his intentions and aspirations after the Edinburgh period. In the long letter of August 2, 1787, addressed to that gentleman, is given the most picturesque and interesting narrative of his early life, a narrative supplemented by the later communications of Gilbert Burns and John Murdoch. It is the longest effort in continuous prose that Burns ever made, and it is by far the best, in point both of style and interest. He seems to have felt that this candid narrative might not conduce to good opinions of his character or conduct, and wrote it "under some very twitching qualms of conscience, that perhaps he was doing what he ought not to do, a predicament he has more than once been in before." The fear, no doubt genuine, was groundless; no one can read the pages of this autobiography without realizing more vividly than before the many difficulties through which Burns rose to fame, while the open confession of faults and failings proves at least that deception had little place in his character.*

* Two copies of the letter are in existence, the one sent to Dr. Moore, now preserved in the British Museum, and the one in the Glenriddell volume of poetry. The text published by Currie and repeated by successive editors is marked by various omissions and alterations. Scott Douglas (iv. 4) gives the full text of the Glenriddell copy.

Among other letters may be noticed a series of seven addressed to his old Irvine friend, Richard Brown (Dec. 30, 1787, to Nov. 4, 1789), which were recovered through David Sillar by Prof. Walker. "Written as they were," says the professor, "at a period when the poet was in the meridian of his reputation, they show that he was at no time so dazzled with success as to forget the friends who had anticipated the public by discovering his merit." The first letter recalls the day in Eglinton woods, when Brown encouraged him to come forward as a poet. In the third, written after a meeting of the friends at Glasgow, there are lines which echo some verses in the *Epistle to Smith*—"Life is a fairy scene; almost all that deserves the name of enjoyment or pleasure is only a charming delusion, and in comes repining age in all the gravity of hoary wisdom, and wretchedly chases away the bewitching phantom." The use of nautical metaphors in one or two of the letters is a good illustration of how Burns tried to adapt his language to his correspondent. The closing letter is written in terms of the strongest affection, and looks forward to a long continuation of their friendship, but one may well believe that it was difficult for the captain of a West Indiaman and a district-bound exciseman to keep up a close acquaintance. After the close of 1789 no more is found of him among the letters of Burns.

Richard Brown.

The correspondent to whom Burns all through his later years was most faithful was Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, a lady of position whose friendship he had secured shortly before his first visit to Edinburgh. The reading of the *Cotter's Saturday Night* had awakened in her an interest in the

Mrs. Dunlop.

poet, which he afterwards acknowledges "with watery eyes. A little, a very little while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stubborn pride of my own bosom; now I am distinguished, patronized, befriended by you" (March 22, 1787). The patronizing would not have been remarkable, many were proud to do so for a season, but the continuance of the friendship gave him great delight. "It requires," he wrote to her in November 1787, about a year after their first meeting, "no common exertion of good sense and philosophy in persons of elevated rank to keep a friendship properly alive with one much their inferior." Mrs. Dunlop certainly succeeded in doing so for several years, though it seems that she too in time became less inclined to be considered his friend,—the result, no doubt, of gossip from Dumfries. So long, however, as the intimacy was maintained, she had Burns's confidence perhaps more than any other person, and when looking forward to settling at Ellisland, he also looked forward to her correspondence "with grateful pleasure, as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life." To her he wrote freely and off-hand "in the fulness of my heart," and these letters are numerous (thirty-seven) down to the close of 1792, after which there are only five in all, the last being written nine days before his death, complaining of her long silence. While most of these epistles are in an easy and natural style, there are some that are not quite free from the faults of his more laboured efforts, especially when he enters on the topic of religion, a theme which appears fairly often—no doubt it was one that Mrs. Dunlop had a liking for. It is in a rhapsody on the possibility of a future life, occasioned by a period of ill-health, that the first mention of Highland Mary occurs. "There should I,

with speechless rapture, again recognize my lost, my ever dear Mary, whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love" (Dec. 13, 1789). A New Year letter (1789) gives an interesting glimpse into the natural religion of the poet, who had his holy days in Summer and Autumn, "to laugh or cry, be cheerful or pensive, moral or devout, according to the mood and tense of the season and myself." Throughout the letters there are a number of remarkable passages, one of which was written a few days before that just quoted (Dec. 17, 1788)—"The heart of the man and the fancy of the poet are the two grand considerations for which I live: if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, etc." The thought is lofty enough, but it inevitably heralds the failure at Ellisland; the heart of the man might go with the hand of the farmer, but the fancy of the poet was a dangerous third.

Mrs. Dunlop was his critic as well as his friend, in a way that pleased him extremely. Burns never cared to have his verses found fault with, unless for musical reasons, in which case he was always ready enough to alter, even to spoil. "*Your* criticisms, my honoured Benefactress, are truly the work of a *friend*. They are not the blasting depredations of a canker-toothed, caterpillar critic; . . . . they are the judicious observations of an animated friendship, selecting the beauties of the piece." This view of the province of criticism throws a vivid light on what the poet's feelings must have been, when he received Dr. Gregory's unceremonious assault on the *Wounded Hare*. It was hardly a fair return for such kind offices on the part of the lady to tell her that for the printing of poetry "you

have only to spell it right, and put the capital letters properly; as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves." One might believe he was jesting, were it not for the generally serious tone of the letters addressed to her.

Another favourite female correspondent was Miss Margaret Chalmers, Gavin Hamilton's relative at Harvieston, to whom eleven letters are preserved, written between October 1787 and September 1788; it is likely that the beginning and end of the series are wanting. If the poet admired her as much as has been supposed, his letters to her show a calmness of language very unusual with him in such cases. This feature is attributed by Josiah Walker, speaking from personal knowledge, to the character of Miss Chalmers herself. "He might have wandered far before he met with an acquaintance so well adapted to call forth all that was laudable in his character, and to check all that was reprehensible, and by this means to draw him into the fairest light, both to others and himself." In the closing letter Burns speaks of their acquaintance, in a way which shows how bitterly he felt the circumstances that removed him again from all the pleasant society of his year of triumph, and sent him back to his plough and rustic associates. "When I think I have met with you, and have lived more real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight years—when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again—I could sit down and cry like a child!" The earlier letters contain many compliments to Miss Chalmers herself and her cousin Charlotte Hamilton, "two favourite resting-places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny

Miss Chalmers.

wilderness of the world." During the period of his Edinburgh accident he is especially confidential with her, and writes on his future prospects in life in somewhat artificial phrases. To her he communicates his adoption of the Excise as a future means of livelihood, and gives an early hint of his marriage in the words, "I have lately made some sacrifices." If Burns really did at one time propose to Miss Chalmers, as she herself stated, his account of his wife in the last letter of the series is in singularly bad taste; even apart from this there is something unpleasant in the manifest attempt to justify his marriage to himself and his correspondent.

Clarinda.

The letters addressed to Clarinda, the "Arcadian name" of Mrs. M'Lehose, undoubtedly form the most notorious portion of the poet's correspondence, a notoriety partly arising from the tone of the letters themselves, and partly from the mystery which was attached to them when they were first given to the world. Dr. Currie did not avail himself of an offer made by Mrs. M'Lehose, to supply him with selected passages from the letters of Burns in return for her own, which were handed back to her after the poet's death. Two years after Currie's edition of the works appeared, twenty-five of the letters to Clarinda were published at Glasgow by Thomas Stewart (1802), apparently through a breach of faith with the lady, who had entrusted the letters on the understanding that they were only to be used in writing a memoir of the poet. "We are happy," says the editor, "that, from the condescension of the proprietor, we are enabled to favour the public with an additional portion of the writings of our favourite poet; *nor is this condescension* the effect of vanity, as from the letters themselves this lady can never be discovered, although, like Swift's

Vanessa, she is, under a fictitious name, ushered into immortality, by an author equally celebrated." This edition was promptly interdicted by the London publishers, but it continued to be reprinted and included in various editions of the poet's works. Clarinda died in 1841, and in 1843 her grandson published the whole of the correspondence, so far as it had remained in the possession of the family.

The letters which passed from Burns to Mrs. M'Lehose during his second winter in Edinburgh (forty of them are preserved, from Dec. 6 to March 21) are not pleasant reading, and give perhaps the most unfavourable view of his character. He may not have been consciously and deliberately deceitful; much of even the worst bombast in these letters was perhaps really sincere at the moment of writing it, but under the circumstances in which both parties were placed, it is not to the credit of Burns that he should have written it. He was no doubt in love—he often was; and Mrs. M'Lehose was ready enough to meet him half-way in his rapturous admiration. In the opening letter she is only "an acquaintance whom I shall ever highly esteem, and in whose welfare I shall ever be warmly interested." In the second it is, "I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself. . . . I am determined to cultivate your friendship with the enthusiasm of religion." The very next, in answer to her first, contains a hint of love, and she promptly feels it necessary to chide him for writing "in your romantic style. Do you remember that she whom you address is a married woman? Or—Jacob-like—would you wait seven years, and even then perhaps be disappointed, as he was? No; I know you better; you have too much of that impetuosity which generally accom-

panies noble minds." There she certainly hit the weak point in Burns's love-affairs; indeed, her quick instinct seems to have given her a knowledge of his character only second to his own. "To be serious," she adds, "most people would think, by your style, that you were writing to some vain silly woman to make a fool of her —or worse. I have too much vanity to ascribe it to the former motive, and too much charity to harbour an idea of the latter." From this Burns forthwith takes his cue, and through all his most extravagant letters and most dangerous love-making, professes to have no feeling for her but what is naturally inspired by honest love for one whose mind is in harmony with his own. "I believe there is no holding converse, or carrying on correspondence, with an amiable woman, much less a *gloriously amiable fine woman*, without some mixture of that delicious passion, whose most devoted slave I have more than once had the honour of being." Clarinda agrees with him, and so the affair goes on, growing more and more confidential and enraptured, Burns writing in his best epistolary style, Clarinda in a natural feminine fashion that makes her letters far more agreeable reading than those of her lover. She appeals to him earnestly on the subject of religion and conduct, but Burns was never very fond of preaching, even from such a source. Religion, he assures her, however, is also his favourite topic, and Calvinist as she is, he is delighted with her "honest enthusiasm" for it. The Calvinists of Ayrshire had never been credited by him with any "honest enthusiasm" for their view of the doctrines of the Church. Worse is it when he confides to her his relations with Jean Armour, and raves of one whose name "is indelibly written in my heart's core—but I dare not look on it—a degree of agony would be the conse-

quence." "Don't guess at these ravings!" he adds. Clarinda came to think that the reference was to herself, and this certainly seems the most natural explanation.

The letters are passionate enough after this, and the interviews, concealed as far as possible from the curiosity of prying neighbours, seem to have been no less fervent, till Clarinda, alarmed by her own weakness, wishes that their parting was over, that she may escape from "those violent heart-agitations which, if continued much longer, would unhinge my very soul, and render me unfit for the duties of life." Meanwhile Burns is on the one hand writing to Miss Chalmers, "I had lately 'a hair-breadth 'scape in th' imminent deadly breach' of love, too. Thank my stars, I got off heart-whole, 'waur fleyed than hurt.'" On the other, he writes to reproach Clarinda for her remonstrances: "I love to madness, and I feel to torture." Could Miss Chalmers have imagined that about the same time her letters were being shown to Clarinda? When the latter's imprudence brings upon her the suspicions of her friends, Sylvander is furious, and talks of "unfeeling, cold-blooded, pitiful Presbyterian bigots," who will not see that a married woman, living apart from her husband, may bestow her affections as she pleases. It was well that at this stage Burns left Edinburgh, leaving her, however, to suffer from the estrangement of her friends, who objected to her conduct. The letters from Burns which follow this have little of the passion of the previous ones; the devotion is mainly on her side now, and his delay of eight days in writing gives her the "cruellest of pains." He now offers only his warmest attachment, sincerest friendship, and regular correspondence as a return for any sacrifices she may have to make on his account. The passage

about Jean Armour is unworthy both of Burns and Clarinda. The notes sent her during his short return to Edinburgh in March are warmer but brief. The last promises to write her every week or at least every fortnight. "Will you," he asks, "open with satisfaction and delight a letter from a man who loves you, who has loved you, and who will love you to death, through death and for ever?" His marriage soon disillusionized the fond fair one, and no letters reached her from Burns till the one of March 9, in the following year, in which he repels, in a high moral tone mingled with artistic flattery, the charge of "perfidious treachery" which his conduct certainly seemed to warrant. The next (Feb. 1790) repeats the excuse of a "conjuncture of unlucky circumstances," and contains the characteristic sentence—"Though I were conscious that I had acted wrong—and I am conscious I have acted wrong—yet would I not be bullied into repentance." The later epistles are scarcely remarkable, except that written after her return from the West Indies, which he carefully copied into the Glenriddell volume as already noted (p. 49). He wishes no letters of mere friendship from her, nor yet to be reminded of the past: "No cold language—*no* prudential documents; I despise advice, and scorn control. If you send me a page baptized in the font of sanctimonious prudence, by heaven, earth, and hell, I will tear it to atoms." The last of the series, written in June 1794, has also been mentioned as a tame conclusion to this remarkable correspondence, in which the letters of both parties must be read for a proper understanding of those of Burns.

The years at Ellisland are perhaps the most fertile in the poet's general correspondence. He is then trying

to keep up a literary correspondence with the most congenial of the Edinburgh friends already named, and to maintain the character not merely of a farmer and a poet, but of a man of letters. The troubles of farming, and later of the Excise, interfere much with this ambition, but he writes to many different people on a variety of topics, in a strain that is often striking even if somewhat forced. The letters of the Dumfries period are not only fewer in number than those of the preceding five years, but their general character is different; they are shorter as a rule, and often deal with matters of little moment. Even the interest of the longer ones is chiefly biographical, as in the eager explanations of his political views addressed to Graham of Fintry and Erskine of Mar. The epistle to the latter (April 13, 1793) shows how keenly Burns felt that his conduct and professions might seem to be at variance with each other. To a mind so eager for fame as his, the thought was gall and bitterness. "My honest fame is my dearest concern; and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of the degrading epithets that Malice or Misrepresentation may affix to my name. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney magazine scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exulting in his hireling paragraphs that 'Burns, notwithstanding the fanfaronade of Independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, he dwindled into a paltry Exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind.'" What follows, about the "sterling of his honest worth," and

the "little independent Britons," comes dangerously near to "fustian rant," but it is very characteristic, as also is the request to Erskine to burn the letter, lest it "ruin the poor BARD for ever," and then transcribing it into the Glenriddell MS.

George Thomson.

The Dumfries period, however, includes the correspondence between Burns and George Thomson, which relates almost entirely to the songs sent by the former for the latter's collection of Scottish music. This correspondence, printed in Currie's fourth volume, was edited by Thomson himself, and there is more than a suspicion that he manipulated a number of his own letters, to what extent it is now impossible to say. Fortunately those of Burns are still in existence, so that their text is beyond any such doubt. The substance of the opening letters has been given on an earlier page (p. 49); the ones which follow dive at once into business—the discussion of tunes, of words, criticisms by Thomson of the songs sent by Burns, surrender or defence of his lines by the poet, and all the necessary technicalities between an editor and his contributor, brightened by occasional humour on the part of Burns, or made dull by the platitudes of Thomson. Considering the opinion which Burns usually had of his own merits, it is a remarkable and not unpleasing feature of the correspondence, how readily he accepts the musician's decision with regard to his verses. "Now don't let it enter into your head," he writes, "that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation in the business of authorship, and have nothing to be pleased or offended at in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Tho' you should reject one-half of what I

give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting t'other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity." The assurance is often repeated, and Thomson certainly availed himself to the full of the permission given him to criticize, if he seldom found it advisable to reject. Burns, on the other hand, was not inclined to give in on every point, and assails his critic's taste in turn, telling him that he does not appreciate the merit of simplicity in a song—the very fault which Dugald Stewart had to find with his own taste in prose. The dispute over *Scots wha hae* is a very typical instance of the differences of opinion between the poet and the musician, in which posterity has justified the poet. The notes on earlier songs scattered throughout the letters give much information of the same nature as that preserved in the MS. notes to Johnson's *Museum*. The break in the correspondence between August 1795 and February 1796 is explained by the troubles in which Burns was then involved, and after that there are only six more letters. One of these charges Thomson to prosecute some piratical printers or publishers—an affair wrapped in some obscurity. The last contains the touching appeal for £5 to save him from the horrors of a jail, ending with "Forgive, forgive me!" It is one of Burns's last letters.

With the work done for Thomson the literary career of Burns closed, and although he had done enough without it to merit the title of Scotland's greatest poet, yet it contains much that will for all time be linked with his name. Thomson, in spite of his somewhat prosaic nature, was not blind to the greatness of the poet's work. "The union you are now forming," he writes, "I think can never be broken; these songs of yours will descend with the music to the latest

posterity, and will be fondly cherished so long as genius, taste, and sensibility exist in our island." To Burns himself the task was a source of enjoyment at a time when he needed it most, nor can the long record of his work be closed more fittingly than with his own words to Thomson. "What with my early attachment to ballads, your book, etc., ballad-making is now as completely my hobby-horse as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race (God grant that I may take the right side of the winning-post!), and then cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing 'Sae merry as we a' hae been,' and, raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of Coila shall be 'Good-night, and joy be wi' you a'.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

LANGUAGE.

THE language of much that is best and most characteristic in the work of Burns is so distinct from literary English that some remarks on it form an almost necessary appendix to a review of the work itself. His use of the Lowland Scottish dialect has, beyond a doubt, told very much both in favour of Burns and against him. On the one hand, it would have been strange if he had been accepted as the poet of Scotland without being Scottish himself; on the other, the difficulty of his language to any but his fellow-countrymen must always prevent the world at large from fully appreciating some of his finest poems. "His candle is bright," said William Cowper, "but shut up in a dark lantern," and so, in spite of glossaries and annotations, it must to some extent remain. The meaning of a word or phrase may be caught from these; its associations, which are far more important, can only be felt by one to whom it has been familiar from childhood. Out of these very associations springs much of the hold that Burns has over the heart of every Scot.

The Scottish dialect.

Of all the dialects of English, the Lowland Scottish is the only one which can lay claim to an independent literature, and its just title to this may readily be allowed, without thereby admitting what Scottish enthusiasm has often claimed

for it—the right to be considered as a separate language. Originally it was identical in all essential points with the dialect of the northern English counties, and even to a patriotic poet like Blind Harry the natural language of a Scot was "Inglis." From these dialects Scottish gradually came to be strongly marked off, and to take its place as a separate form of speech, which had a position superior to other dialects of English in being the language of a people, of a court, and of a continuous literary movement. This separate development was checked towards the close of the sixteenth century; and together with the decay of the older Scottish literature, and the removal of the court to England, the language began to sink into the position of a subordinate dialect. All through the seventeenth century the old literary tradition is rapidly disappearing, and the Scottish forms are steadily displaced from documents by the corresponding English ones. The line of literary descent being thus almost completely broken, it is in a new phase that the language meets us at the revival of Scottish literature in the beginning of the eighteenth century. What we find in the verse of Hamilton or Ramsay is largely the colloquial Scottish of their own day, which in substance as well as in outward appearance differs widely from the tongue of the older writers.* It is true that many of the changes which mark it are already indicated in the verse of the sixteenth century, not so much by the

Modern Scottish.

* Changes in spelling partly account for the difference, but the vocabulary is also to some extent new. Many of the words most characteristic of modern Scottish rarely or never occur in the older authors, e.g. *bonnie, braw, cannie, wee, wean, laddie, lassie, ken, lug, ay* (= yes), etc.

spelling, which is very conventional and conservative, as by the rhymes, which often betray the real pronunciation of a word. Still the difference between the old and new Scottish is very marked, and shows clearly that the latter is a revival and not a direct continuation of the older literature. It is the chief merit of Ramsay that he led the way in this revival, and brought back the native speech of the country into its poetry at least: it was long before it took as worthy a place in prose. That Ramsay was able to do this with success was partly due to the fact that the Scottish dialect still held its own as a spoken tongue even in the higher ranks of society. "Till the middle of the present century" (the eighteenth), writes Mr. Ramsay of Auchtertyre, "every Scotsman, from the peer to the peasant, spoke a truly Doric language. It is true the English novelists and poets were by that time read by every person of condition, and considered as the standards for polite composition. But, as national prejudices were still strong, the busy, the learned, the gay, and the fair continued to speak their native dialect, and that with an elegance and pregnancy of which Scotsmen of the present day can have no just notion." Allan Ramsay had not the unerring taste which could have separated what was excellent in the Scottish tongue from what was commonplace or even vulgar; and his works often show the error, common to many writers of Scottish, of introducing a word merely because it is native and familiar, without any regard to its elegance or fitness. His namesake just quoted considered his style to be "natural without being low . . . such as country people in these situations speak every day," and, in advising Burns to write a Scottish drama, told him just to "bring down his style a very little." What-

ever Burns might have done had he taken this advice to heart, there can be no doubt that in his Scottish verse he is almost, if not altogether, free from the defects of his predecessor. With one or two possible exceptions, his Scottish is never misplaced, never vulgar, never obtrusive; its homeliness is of the true kind, which goes straight to the heart and touches the exact chord that it is intended to sound. In this way it is not only his natural form of expression, it is also the most powerful that he could have employed, conveying his meaning and his message as no other language could have done. At the same time, despite his copious use of its words and phrases, he is no purist in Scottish, and does not hesitate to combine it with the forms of literary English in ever-varying degrees, or to desert it altogether in his more serious moods. The constant use of the English Bible and other religious works had made the native dialect seem less fitted for the expression of the deeper emotions; it was thus a true and instinctive feeling that led Burns to confine it to subjects that admitted either of familiar humour, homely feeling, or simple pathos. On the nature of the poem or song depends to a great extent the use he makes of what was, in the full sense of the term, his "mother-tongue." In the *Cotter's Saturday Night* it is only the simple scenes of cottage life that are described in it, while the higher themes are carried out in pure English. The same is the case with the *Epistle to Davie* or *The Vision*, in which the Scottish element is either dropped after the first few verses, or retained only in isolated words. On the other hand, his familiar epistles and more humorous poems—*Mailie*, *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, *The Holy Fair*, *Halloween*, *The Twa Dogs*,

Burns's Scottish.

Tam o' Shanter, etc.—fairly bristle with words strange to every reader except the native Lowlander, and sometimes unknown even to him, owing to the changes of the past century. Yet it is only on occasion that Burns is so Scottish as to be altogether mysterious to the outsider. Lines like "A smytrie o' wee duddie weans," "A daimen icker in a thrave," "A tapetless, ramfeezl'd hizzie," may be dark enough without a glossary, but they are not to be found on every page. Perhaps the most thoroughly Scottish of all his poems are two that come together in the first edition—*Hallowe'en*, which is full of graphic country words, and *The Auld Farmer's Salutation to his Auld Mare*, in which the aged man discourses with Maggie as with "the mother of Evander," so old-world is his speech. One verse has often been admired for the vigour of its Scottish phrasing—

> "Thou never brang't, an' fetch't, an' flisket,
> But thy auld tail thou wad hae whisket,
> An' spread abreed thy weel-fill'd brisket,
> Wi' pith an' power,
> Till sprittie knowes wad rair't an' risket,
> An' slypet owre."

"Slypet" is one of those many Scottish words, descriptive of natural action, that have no adequate counterpart in English.

Although the native dialect of Burns was that of Ayrshire, there are few, if any, traces of this in his writings. He was too much under the influence of Ramsay and Fergusson to break away from the usage they had established in the writing of the Scottish tongue. His language therefore is not local, but represents the general dialect of southern Scotland, even of the east rather than the west. It

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may be doubted too whether a number of the words employed by Burns were actually in common use in his own district or in his own day. It is quite possible that they are part of his legacy from the earlier poets. On this point it is difficult to speak with certainty, but in his songs at least some rare words and phrases do belong to an older day than his own.

In writing their Scottish poems, Ramsay and Fergusson had to a great extent followed the current English orthography, except where the Scottish form was so different that it required to be marked by a distinct spelling. Their practice in this respect is largely followed by Burns, whose language in his Scottish poems is thus really further removed from the English standard than the orthography might suggest. To the Scot, who pronounces the words in his own way, the spelling makes no difference; to the English reader it may be somewhat misleading. Thus Burns regularly writes the forms *right*, *light*, *thought*, *sought*, etc., pointing out at the beginning of his glossary that the *gh* has "the guttural sound," so that the words are to be pronounced (as they are now often written) *richt*, *licht*, *thocht*, *socht*, etc. So also he writes *fool*, *soon*, *moor*, *do*, in which the Scottish vowel is quite distinct from the English one, resembling the *u* of French, and now more commonly expressed by the spellings *fule*, *sune*, *muir*. Only in *guid*, or *gude*, does Burns generally indicate the real pronunciation of such words.

Orthography.

In the first edition of his poems the orthography has some peculiarities that are dropped in the later ones, probably under Edinburgh influence. The most notable of these is the distinction made between the verbal noun and the present participle; the former correctly

ends in *-in* (for *-ing*), and the latter in *-an* (for *-and*), as in this verse—

> "An' now, auld Cloots, I ken ye're think*an*,
> A certain bardie's rant*in*, drink*in*,
> Some luckless hour will send him link*an*,
> To your black pit,
> But, faith, he'll turn a corner jink*an*,
> An' cheat you yet."

The Kilmarnock text also employs the form *-et* for the preterite and past participle of weak verbs, e. g. *keepet*, *thanket*, *howket*, etc.; the later editions show the more genuine Scottish forms, *keepit*, *thankit*, *howkit*, etc. Burns, however, is also given to retaining the English ending *-ed*, even where it rhymes with *-it*, as for instance in the lines—

> "He saw her days were near hand ended,
> But, wae's my heart! he could na mend it."

Rhymes.

This practice of retaining the current English spelling, wherever possible, not only tends to disguise the full extent of the Scottish element in Burns, but is also apt to give an exaggerated idea of what is a real peculiarity with him,—the inexactness of his rhymes. In many cases the rhyme is correct enough, though the spelling may give no clue to this. Thus, in the lines,

> "But when Divinity comes *cross* me,
> My readers still are sure to *lose* me,"

the rhyme becomes quite regular when *lose* is pronounced as *loss*, which is the constant Scottish form. So, in a very large number of cases, a knowledge of the Scottish pronunciation will justify an apparent inexactness of rhyme, or at least will go far to explain why the poet's ear found such a rhyme admissible. This does not

apply to his frequent and intentional use of assonance in place of rhyme, but covers a very large number of cases in which vowels of indefinite quality are freely rhymed together. The Scottish sounds of these vowels run much more into each other than the corresponding English ones, so that the discrepancy is not so great as it appears in writing. The list given below will serve to indicate the general lines on which Burns rhymes these sounds with each other: instances may be found on almost every page in his purely Scottish poems.*

One particular rhyming practice is so constant with Burns as to deserve special notice,—that of treating the vowel sounds in *eye* and *joy* as identical. This is not peculiar to him among the poets of last century, but no other writer uses it so persistently.† That he considered

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* *a* : *e*, as :—sense : chance : pretence : glance.
canty : plenty : tent aye : kenn'd aye.
blast : west : rest : haste.
a : *e* : *i*, as :—clatter : water : whitter : better.
rigs : legs : haggs : wags.
a : *i*, as :—Willie : brawlie : silly : billy.
forgather : swither : shouther : ither.
ae : *ie*, as :—to me : forgie me : frae me.
e : *i*, as :—hills : fells : skills : themsels.
e : *i* : *u*, as :—wrench : inch : glunch : punch.
i : *ĭ*, as :—grip : up : stop : whip.
i : *ĭ* : *ĭ*, as :—woods : buds : whids : croods.
a : *o*, as :—forms : charms : warms : storms.
o : *u*, as :—thorn : morn : turn : born.
o : *ĭ*, as :—tod : wood : road : bluid.
u : *u*, as :—hour : poor : stour : secure.

The quality of the consonant which follows the vowel has naturally something to do with the possibility of these rhymes.

† He employs it both when the sound is final (as *joy* : *cry*) and when followed by a consonant (*child* : *foil'd*), but the latter is the more common case.—Another rhyme worth drawing attention to

it a correct rhyme is proved by his emendation of one of Clarinda's verses. She wrote—

> "But Friendship's pure and lasting *joys*
> My heart was formed to prove;
> The worthy object be of *those*,
> But never talk of love."

Here Burns remarks "a slight inaccuracy" in the rhyme, and removes it by altering the third line to

> "There, welcome, win and wear the *prize*."

In wealth of vocabulary Burns is quite as Scottish as either Ramsay or Fergusson, employing at least some ten or twelve hundred words, which are either peculiar to the dialect, or have meanings very distinct from the same forms in English. The glossaries in most editions of his poetry, following the example of his own Kilmarnock and Edinburgh ones, include a large number of words which only differ from English by a single letter, e.g. *barkit*, *barkin* for *barked*, *barking*. Apart from this redundancy, Burns's own glossary is an excellent piece of work; his explanations

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is that of *squires*, *shires* with *affairs*, *pray'rs*, or of *time* with *hame*. A pronunciation which would account for this is indicated by the uneducated spelling of last century; on country tombstones may be seen forms like *dayed*, *said*, *may* = died, side, my, and the same rhyme occurs in epitaphs, as

> "Now in her husband's grave the wife is *laid*,
> No time nor death could her from him *divide*."

In the words *mire* and *fire* Burns makes this diphthong count as two syllables in the following lines—

> "Their roomy *fire*-side" (*Ep. to Davie*).
> "That sweetens a' their *fire*-side" (*Twa Dogs*).
> "Trod in the *mire* out o' sight" (*Cry and Prayer*).
> "And binds the *mire* like a rock" (*Tam Samson's El.*).

while in the *Holy Fair* he rhymes *fire* with *shyer*.

of the words are based on a full conception of their force, and are very clearly and concisely expressed. To the reader who wishes thoroughly to understand Burns, the glossary is a necessary addition to the poems, whether it appear in the shape of appendix, foot-notes, or side-notes.

For that part of the Scottish vocabulary which is substantially one with English, some general rules may be of service. These words differ from their English equivalents either by showing a different vowel or by dropping some consonant; sometimes both features are combined. The vowels in Scottish had a different course of development from the English ones, especially in the retention of an *a* or *ä* where the southern dialects tended to *o*. The following list will show the general lines of equation between the two forms of speech, and may assist the non-Scottish reader of Burns to catch the more outstanding features of his language.

VOWELS.

1. Scottish ă = English ŏ:—*aff* (off), *aft* (oft), *saft* (soft), *craft* (croft); *gat* (got), *pat* (pot), *wat* (wot); *crap* (crop), *drap* (drop), *stap* (stop); *sab* (sob), *gab* (gob, mouth); *lang* (long), *sang* (song), *strang* (strong), *wrang* (wrong).
2. ā = ō :— *na* (no), *twa* (two), *wha* (who).
3. ä* = ō :— *ae* (O.E. o = one), *fae* (foe), *frae* (fro = from), *gae* (go), *mae* (mo = more), *nae* (no), *sae* (so), *slae* (sloe), *wae* (woe); *grape* (grope), *rape*, *raep* (rope); *aits* (oats); *lade* (load), *gaed* (went; *claith* (cloth); *claes*, *claise* (clothes), *aith* (oath),

* Burns identifies this sound with "the French *e* masculine," and it is still so pronounced in some districts, but has more commonly assumed a narrower form, identical with that used in *head*, *lear*, *seat*, etc. In either case the sound of Scottish *sae*, etc., is very different from that of English *say*, etc. The *ä* is pure in a few words like *ain*, *braid*, *rade*, *sair* (serve).

baith (both), *laith* (loath); *ane* (one), *hane* (bone), *grane* (groan), *lane* (lone), *stane* (stone); *hame* (home), *faem* (foam); *hale* (whole), *kail* (cole-wort); *mair* (more), *sair* (sore); *hearse* (hoarse); *maist* (most), etc.

4. au = ō :— *auld* (old), *bauld* (bold), *cauld* (cold), *fauld* (fold), *tauld* (told), *scaul'* (scold), *gaun* (going).

5. au = ow :—*awe* (owe), *blaw* (blow), *craw* (crow), *law* (low), *maw* (mow), *raw* (a row), *saw* (sow), *shaw* (show), *slaw* (slow), *snaw* (snow).

6. au = ai :— *straught* (straight), *saunt* (saint), *daur* (dare). Cf. *awa'* (away).

7. eu = oo — *beuk* (book), *heuk* (hook), *leuk* (look), *neuk* (nook), *sheuk* (shook), *teuk* (took).

8. ee = y :— *flee*, *flie* (fly), *hie* (high), *die* (die), *lie* (to tell lies), *slee* (sly). Burns always writes *die* and *lie*, but the sound is *dee*, *lee*.

9. i = ŏ (ŭ) :—*ither* (other), *anither* (another), *tither* (t'other), *mither* (mother), *dizzen* (dozen), *sin* (son, with which *shin* rhymes in one passage).

10. i = ŭ, u :— *rin* (run), *sinn* (sun), *simmer* (summer), *kirn* (churn), *jimp* (jump), *tip* (tup; ram), *nit* (nut), *bill* (bull), *pit* (put), *fit* (foot).

11. ui = oo :— *guid*, *gude* (good), *bluid* (blood). Other words showing the same orthography are *bure* (bore), *buirdly*, *brulyie*, *tulyie*, *luve* (love). Burns, however, prefers to write the sound as *oo*, in which form it occurs in a large number of words—*cloot* (a hoof), *Clootie* (Satan), *sootie*, *cootie* (a pail), *loot* (allowed); *coost* (threw), *boost* (behoved); *cood* (cud), *rood*; *loof* (palm), *coof* (block-head); *fool*, *dool* (grief), *schwol*, *snool* (cringe), *stool*, *hoolie* (quietly); *foor* (went), *moor*, *poor*, *swoor* (swore); *boord* (board), *foord* (ford), *hoord* (hoard); *croon* (moan), *noon*, *soon*, *roon* (a shred); *toom* (empty); *roose* (to praise); *loove* (love); *lo'e* has the same vowel.*

12. ū = ou :— The English diphthong in *now*, *house* is in Scottish represented by the vowel ū, but Burns follows

* The rhyme *dails* : *stools* in the *Holy Fair* shows that Burns inclined to the pronunciation now current in the southern counties, by which *puir*, for instance, becomes more like *pair*.

the old practice of the language in writing *ou* or *ow*. This is the case with all words like *mouse, hour, loun, roun'*, *drown, show'r, cow, now*, etc., as well as the purely Scottish words *crouse, douce, dour, stour* and others.

CONSONANTS.

1. The dropping of *l*, especially final *-ll*, is a feature of the Scottish dialect which produces the following common forms:—

   -al becomes *-au*, as in—*saut* (salt, *maut, scaul, caudron, faut, haud* (= *hald*, hold). This is merely an extension of the law which accounts for the pronunciation of *ha'f* or *calf* in English.

   -all becomes *-a'*, as in—*a'*, *ba'*, *ca'*, *fa'*, *hafa'*, *ha'*, *sma'*.

   -ol, -oll become *-ow*, as in—*gowd* (gold, *cowt* (colt), *stown* (stolen); *knowe* (knoll), *pow* (poll), *rowe* (roll), *howe* (hollow).

2. Final *d* is dropped after *l* and *n*, as in—*fiel'*, *chiel'* (= child, *scaul'* (scold), *warl'* (world), *war'ly* (worldly); *han'* (hand), *stan'* (stand); *en'*, *len'*, *men'*, *sen'*; *kin'*, *min'*, *behin'*, *frien'*; *roun'*. Burns sometimes writes the *d* where the rhyme shows that it is not pronounced.

3. Several words drop a *v* in the middle or at the end, e.g. *gi'e* (give), *ga'e* (gave), *ha'e* (have), *lea'e* (leave), *prie* (*prieve*, prove), *lo'e* (love); *e'en* (even), *de'il* (devil), *lee-lang* live-long, *leeze* me (*leif is* me); *shool* (shovel), *aboon* (above-n); *hair't* (harvest), *siller* (silver); *twal'* (twelve), *sair* (serve); *sel'* (self belongs to the same class of words.

There are other isolated peculiarities which need not be catalogued, but one point of syntax deserves a few lines of explanation. Burns repeatedly expresses the future tense by the form 's or '*se*, as in the lines—

"I'*se* no insist."
"Thou's be as braw and bienly clad."
"We'*se* be acquainted better."
"In my last plack thy part's be in't."

This 's or 'se is the survival of the old Scottish *sal* shall, otherwise dropped in favour of *will*. In older Scottish writings are to be found the transitional forms *I s'l* I sal, etc. In the modern dialect it is only retained in a few phrases like "I'*se* warrant," "I'*se* uphaud."

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